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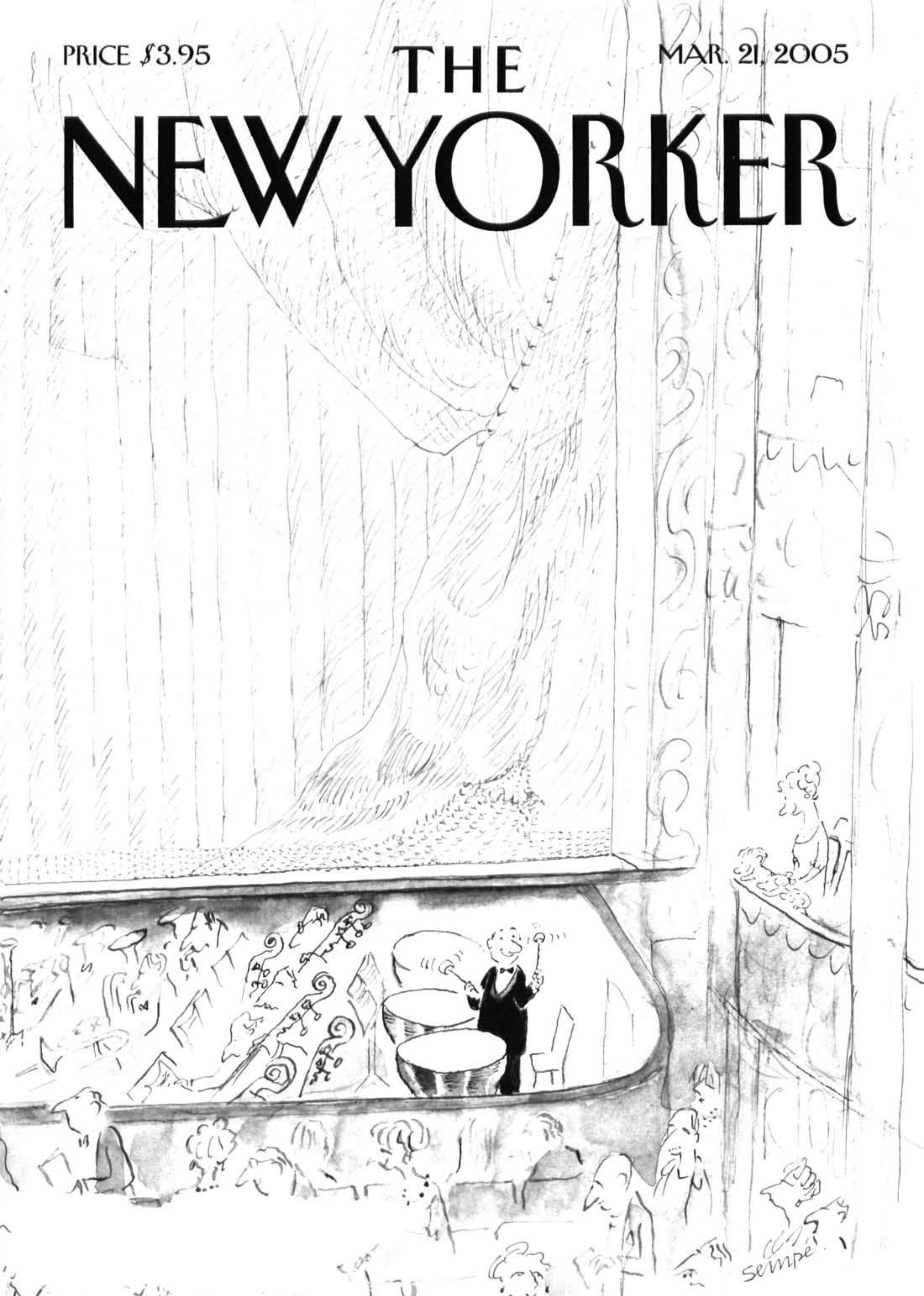

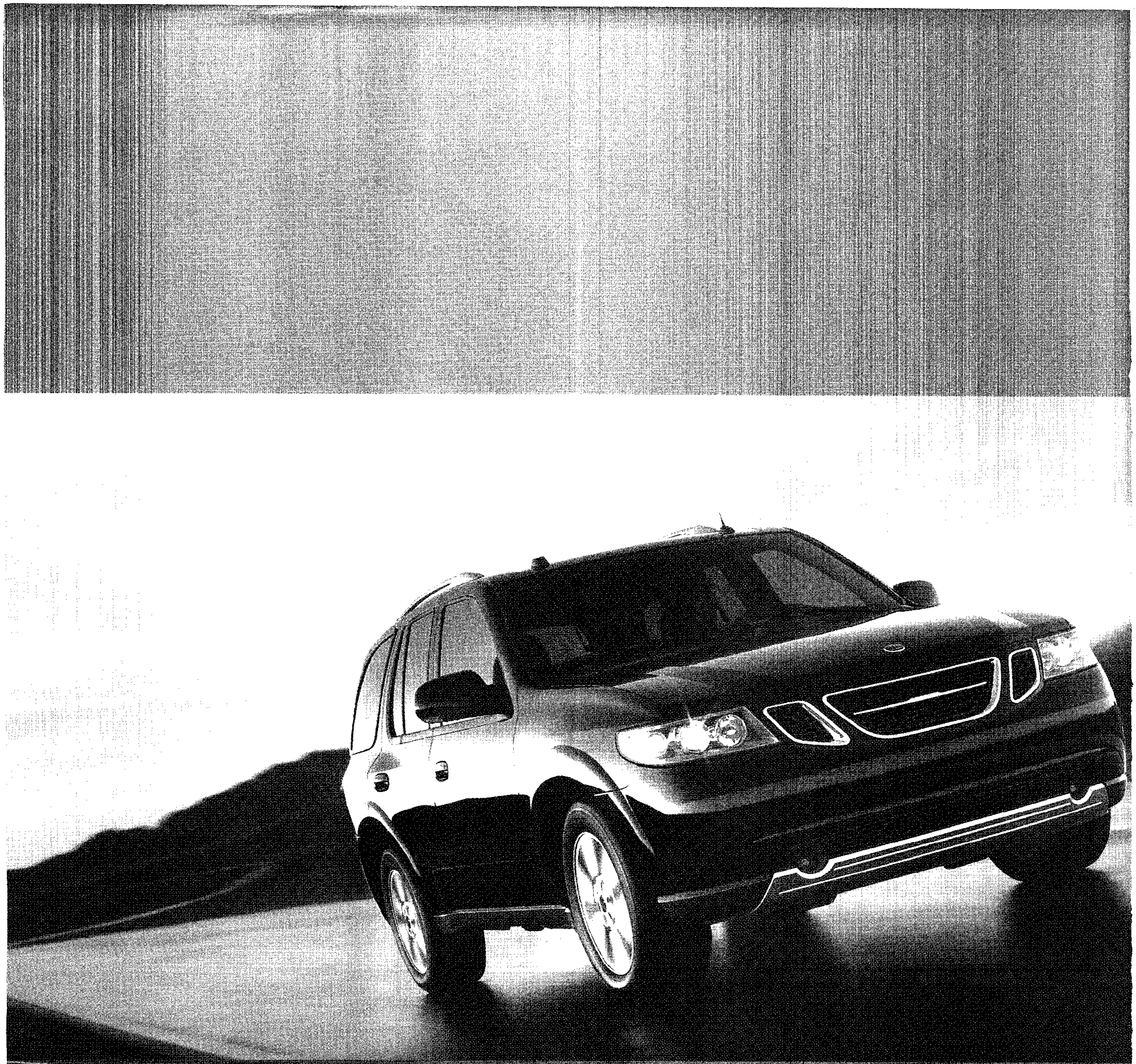

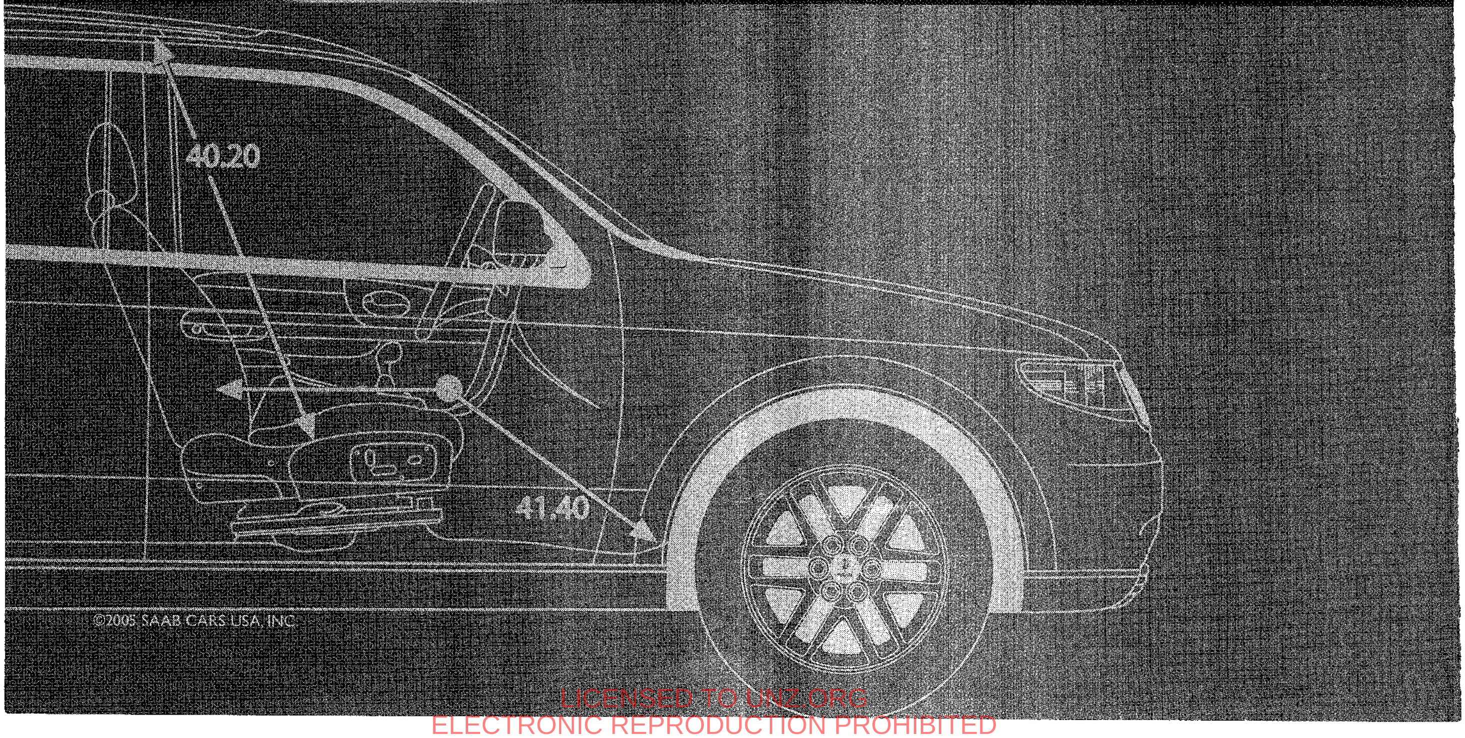

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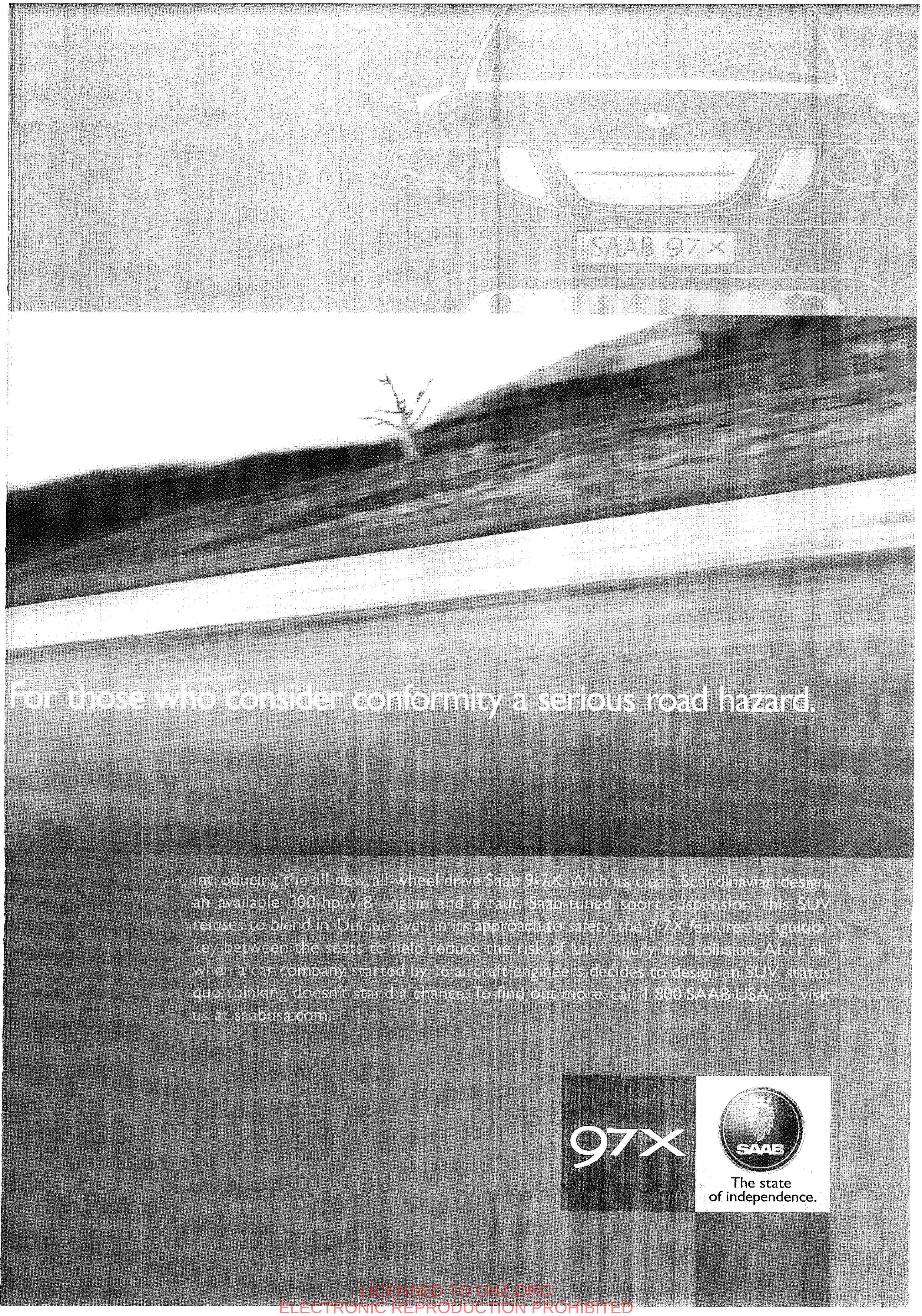
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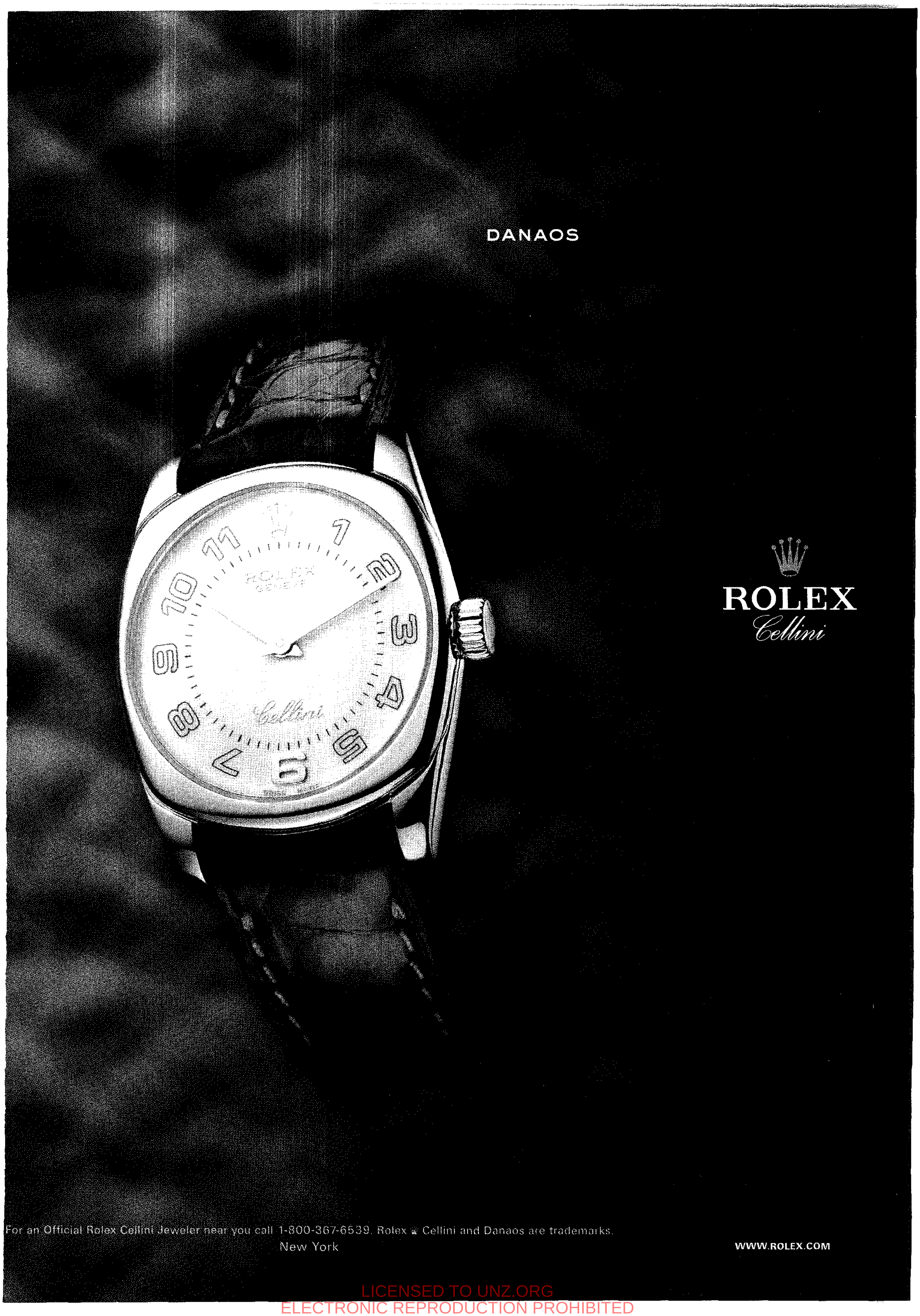
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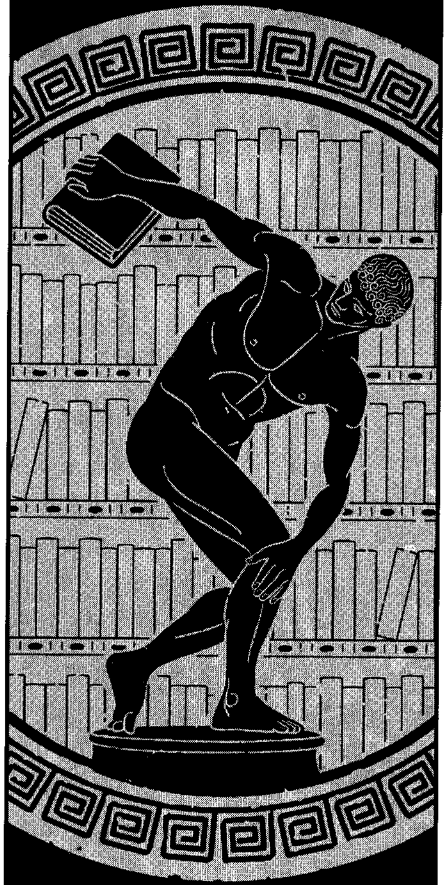

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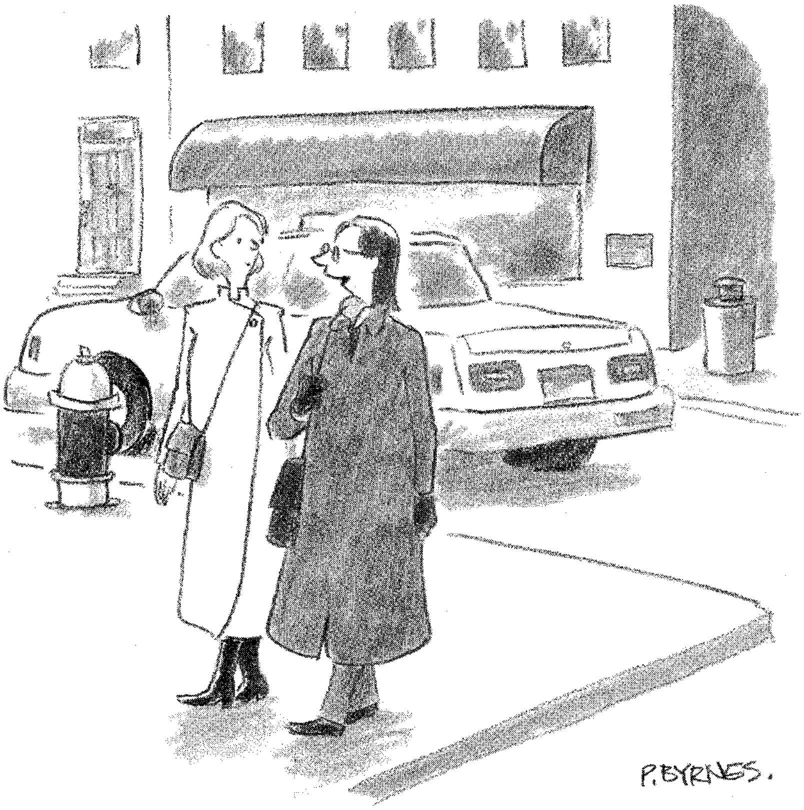

"I'm doing a lot better now that I'm back in denial."

THE MAIL

NOW WE ARE KINGS

Marcellus Hall's illustration of Adam and Eve being cast out of Manhattan by the hand of God is to be commended for its prominent placement of the Brooklyn Bridge, the world's most beautiful (Cover, March 7th). I am concerned, however, that my copy of the issue may have been missing a second panel, in which the couple realize that what awaits them on the other side of the bridge is not a dark cloud of doom but the promised land itself. High rents might push some residents out of Manhattan, but we Brooklynites welcome these émigrés with open arms to our better quality of life, our unrivalled diversity, and maybe even a nice brownstone. Just as Saul Steinberg's famous westward view from Ninth Avenue exaggerated Manhattanites' perspective in 1976, your East River scene in 2005 misleads by rendering gloom where there should be a glow: crossing the bridge is actually a blessing in disguise. Besides, what better than the hand of God to direct you toward the most divine bagels and lox?

Marty Markowitz
President, Borough of Brooklyn
Brooklyn, N.Y.

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Jim Holt makes the common assertion that Albert Einstein's 1905 paper on special relativity was the most radical of the five seminal papers he wrote that year (A Critic at Large, February 28th). However, the "theory of invariance," as it was known, gained considerable acceptance in the next few years within the German physics community; Max Planck was one early convert. It was Einstein's paper on the photoelectric effect that was considered truly blasphemous. The evidence that light travelled in waves seemed incontrovertible, and the idea that something could be both a particle and a wave was incomprehensible. Einstein himself initially wrote that thinking of light in this way was a "heuristic device," which allowed him to make a prediction about the relation between light frequency and the electric current produced when it strikes a metal surface. In 1916, the experimental physicist Robert Andrews Millikan published results showing that Einstein's prediction was correct—for which he later won the Nobel Prize in Physics. However, it was not until 1922, when Arthur Compton showed that light particles could scatter off molecules, that the scientific community was forced to accept the particle-wave nature of light.

Timothy Johnston
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Holt quotes Einstein's striking opinion that he and his colleague Kurt Gödel became "museum pieces" thanks to their unfashionable ideas within their respective fields—namely, Einstein's rejection of quantum theory and Gödel's Platonic belief that mathematical abstractions such as numbers "had a perfect, timeless existence independent of the human mind." It is a suggestive parallel, but the rejection of mathematical abstractions in philosophy probably does not enjoy quite the status of quantum mechanics in physics. Although anti-abstractionism was certainly a mainstream view in mid-century analytic philosophy, even at that time, many important mathematical logicians such as Alonzo Church remained firm Platonists. And even so strong an opponent of Platonism as W. V. O. Quine admitted that parts of mathematics required Platonist assumptions. Today, the pendulum has swung back, and the anti-Platonist view in mathematics has become far less accepted than it was at the time of Einstein and Gödel's conversations. Widely respected figures like Saul Kripke, David Lewis, and David Kaplan have been quite happy to embrace logical Platonism, and logical positivism and aggressive anti-Platonism are in decline.

Michael Neumann
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Trent University
Peterborough, Ontario

•

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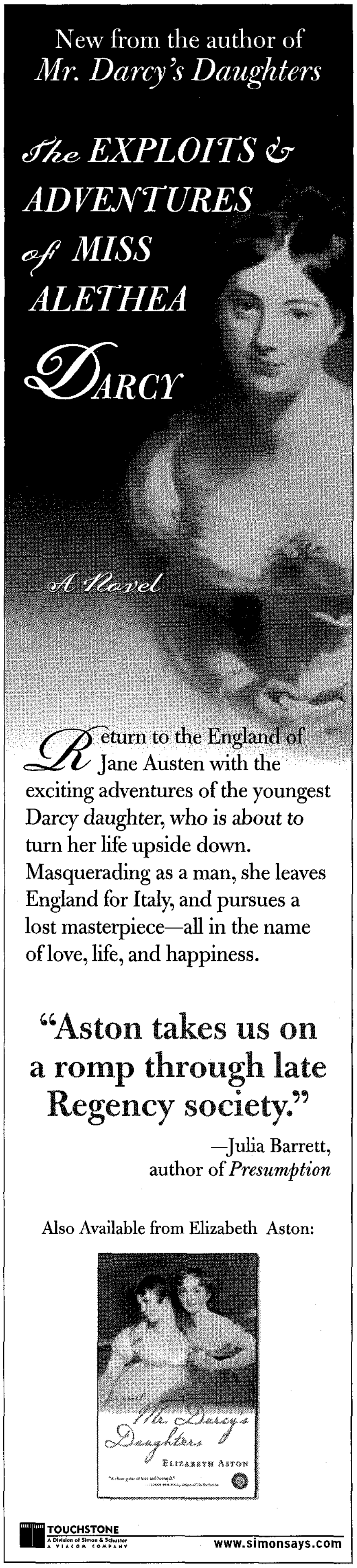

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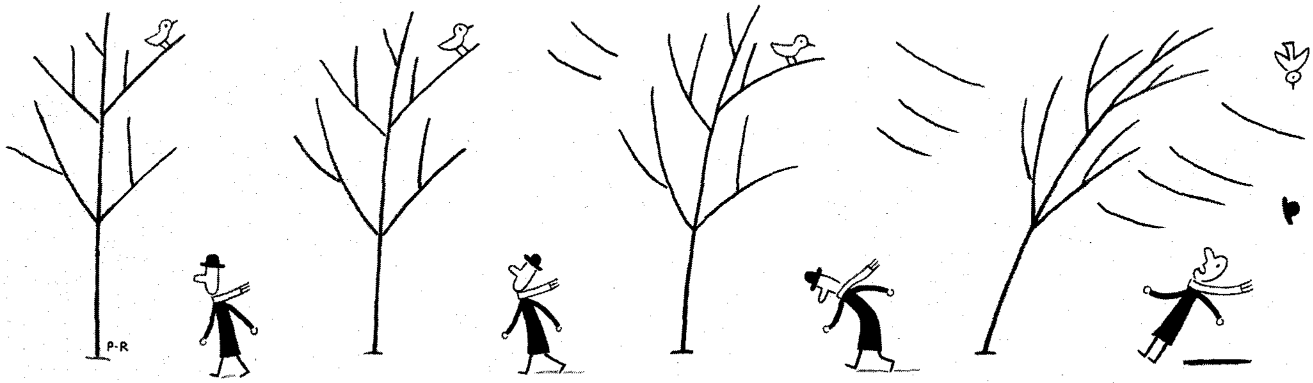

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			16	17	18	19
20	21	22				

For expanded events listings, please visit www.newyorker.com/goingson.

THIS WEEK
SLINT REDUX

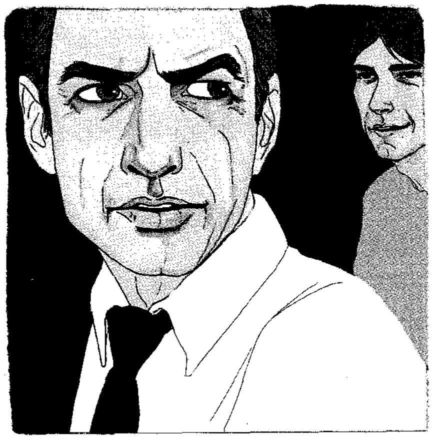
If there is a Loch Ness monster of indie rock, it is Slint. In the late eighties and early nineties, this four-piece band from Louisville, Kentucky, recorded two full-length albums and an EP and played only a handful of shows outside their home town. Their perfect second album, "Spiderland," is a glacial, largely instrumental affair that gave far too many bands the idea of eliminating vocals and slowing tempos to a crawl. Slint has reunited for a brief tour, which includes three nights at Irving Plaza. They played New York only once before, at the tiny Pyramid Club, which is not large enough to hold all the people who claim to have seen the show. (March 17-19; see Night Life.)

UNEASY SLEEP

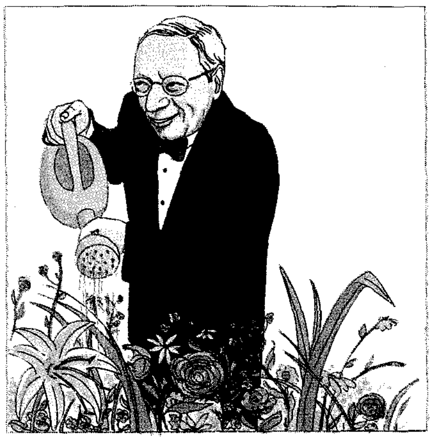
The Irish playwright Martin McDonagh likes to burrow into the minds of people you would edge away from on a park bench. In his new play, "The Pillowman," set in an unnamed totalitarian regime, a young man (Billy Crudup) writes gruesome short stories about children who meet horrific fates. When the stories start coming true, a local official (Jeff Goldblum) interrogates the author. (Booth, previews start March 21; see Theatre.)

NEW VOICES

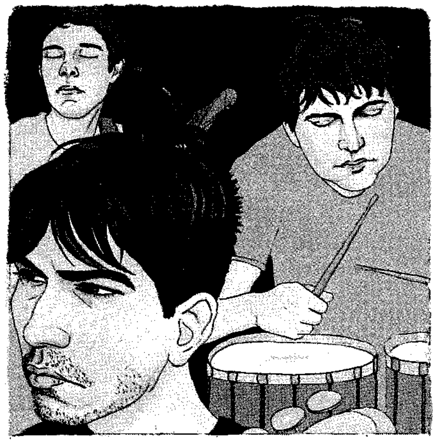
William Christie, the Buffalo-born director of the French Baroque group Les Arts Florissants, has worked with such power divas as Renée Fleming and Susan Graham, but he's determined to apply his exacting standards to young singers as well. That's the idea behind "Le Jardin des Voix" ("Garden of Voices"), a showcase for seven singers chosen after extensive auditions (they include the soprano Amel Brahim Djelloul, from Algiers, and the British tenor Andrew Tortise). They make their U.S. début as an ensemble with semi-staged scenes and arias (by Purcell, Handel, Charpentier, and others), with Christie and the Florissants orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall, March 16-17; see Classical Music.)



Jeff Goldblum and Billy Crudup in Martin McDonagh's "The Pillowman."



William Christie's "Le Jardin des Voix," at Alice Tully Hall.



LARA TOMLIN

The Louisville, Kentucky, band Slint reunites for a set of shows.

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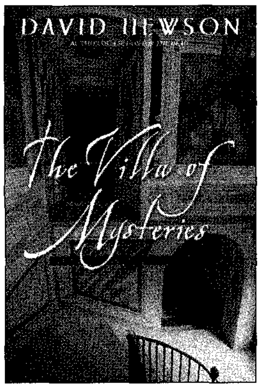

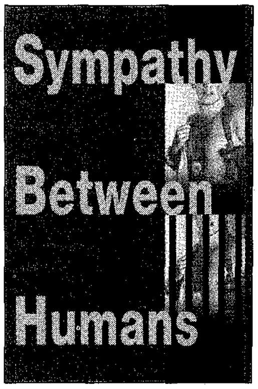

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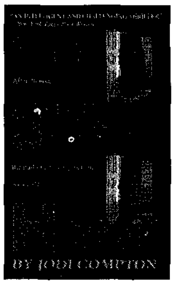

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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ALL SHOOK UP
The spirit of Elvis lives on in a new musical comedy set to his songs, with a book by Joe DiPietro, musical direction and arrangements by Stephen Oremus, and choreography by Ken Roberson. Directed by Christopher Ashley. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

DESSA ROSE
Sherley Anne Williams's novel about an antebellum-era friendship between a runaway slave (LaChanze) and an abandoned wife (Rachel York) has become a musical, with book and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and music by Stephen Flaherty. Choreographed and directed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. Opens March 21 at 6:45. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

DOUBT
John Patrick Shanley's well-told tale about possible sexual abuse in a Catholic school comes to Broadway. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAUST IN LOVE
The second installment of Target Margin Theatre's three-part adaptation of Goethe's classic stars David Greenspan as Mephisto, Eunice Wong as Gretchen, and George Hannah as Faust. Adapted by Douglas Langworthy. Directed by David Herskovits. Previews begin March 17. Opens March 21 at 7. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-358-3657.)

THE GLASS MENAGERIE
Jessica Lange and Christian Slater star in a revival of Tennessee Williams's drama. Directed by David Leveaux. In previews. Opens March 22 at 6:45. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOING TO ST. IVES
Lee Blessing's drama about a monstrous dictator from sub-Saharan Africa and his conscience-stricken mother has its première at Primary Stages. Directed by Maria Mileaf. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOT 'N' THROBBING
Rebecca Wisocky stars in the final production of the Signature Theatre Company's Paula Vogel season, a drama about a woman who writes erotic screenplays to support her children. Directed by Les Waters. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

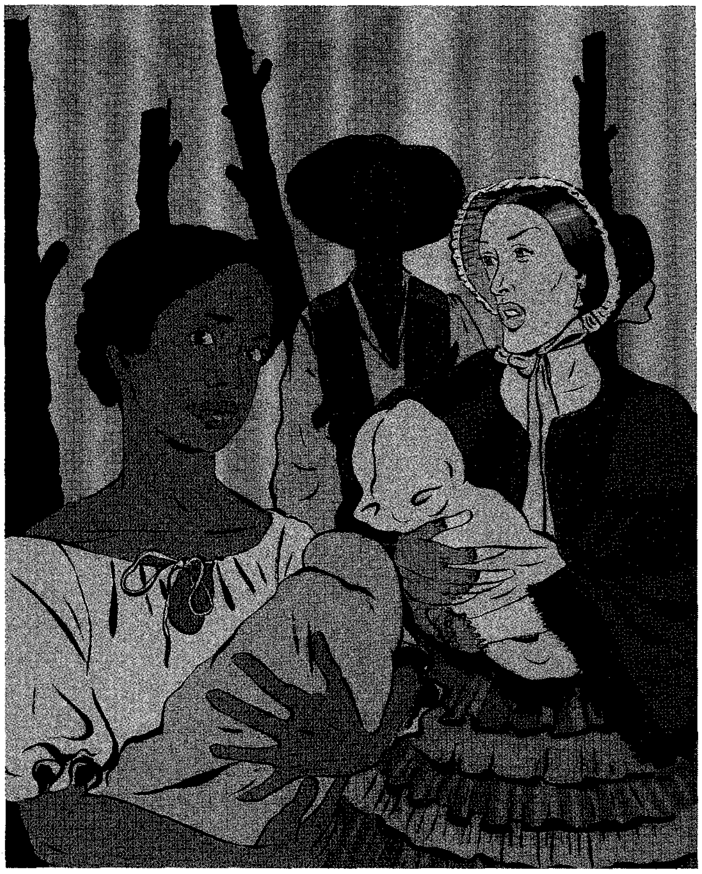
THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA
A musical based on Elizabeth Spencer's novella about a mother and daughter travelling through Italy in 1953. Previews begin March 17. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS
A new play by Ron Hutchinson shows the tensions that raged behind the scenes as David O. Selznick, the director Victor Fleming, and the screenwriter Ben Hecht struggled to write the screenplay for "Gone with the Wind," in 1939. Directed by Lynn Meadows. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ON GOLDEN POND
James Earl Jones and Leslie Uggams play Norman and Ethel Thayer in a revival of Ernest Thompson's play about a family reunion at a cabin in the Adirondacks. Previews begin March 22. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PILLOWMAN
A new drama by the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh stars Billy Crudup and Jeff Goldblum (see This Week). Previews begin March 21. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SHAKESPEARE REVUE
London's Royal Shakespeare Company comes to the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts with its cabaret-style presentation of comic songs inspired by the Bard, written by Noël Coward, Cole Porter, and other wags. March 20 at 2. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500.)



"Dessa Rose," a new musical in previews at Lincoln Center.

ZOHAR LAZAR

SPAMALOT
The Monty Python musical stars David Hyde Pierce, Tim Curry, and Hank Azaria. With a book by Eric Idle and music and lyrics by Idle and John Du Prez. Directed by Mike Nichols. In previews. Opens March 17 at 6:30. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

STEEL MAGNOLIAS
Delta Burke, Christine Ebersole, and Frances Sternhagen lead the cast in a revival of Robert Harling's play about the relationships between a close-knit group of women in the South. Directed by Jason Moore. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THIS IS HOW IT GOES
An interracial love triangle is the subject of a new play by Neil LaBute that stars Amanda Peet, Ben Stiller, and Jeffrey Wright. Directed by George C. Wolfe. In previews. Opens March 20 at 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?
Edward Albee's sparring George and Martha are played by Bill Irwin and Kathleen Turner in a revival of the 1962 drama. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AFTER ASHLEY
Gina Gionfriddo is a gifted young writer with unusual psychological insight that is, unfortunately, not yet matched with narrative skill. Her portraits of Ashley, a transgressive, childish mother (the excellent Dana Eskelson), and her troubled teen-age son, Justin (Kieran Culkin, in a subtle performance), are powerful. But when the mother's murder elevates the son into the national spotlight, he goes into a rebellious tailspin, and the play turns into a tedious satire on the sensationalism of the press. Anna Paquin co-stars as a grief groupie, drawn to Justin's tragic past. Terry Kinney directs. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

ALTAR BOYZ
A musical comedy about a Christian boy band has lyrics like "Girl, you make me wanna wait." Conceived by Marc Kessler and Ken Davenport, with a score by Gary Adler and Michael Patrick Walker and a book by Kevin Del Aguila. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

BROOKLYN BOY
In Donald Margulies's new play, Eric (Adam Arkin), a young literary lion, interrupts his book tour to visit his dying father, Manny (the baleful Allan Miller), in the cancer ward of a Brooklyn hospital. Manny isn't big on reading; he is, however, big on belittling. Margulies's portrait of envy's spoiling rage is served up with large dollops of humor and a pinch of reparation. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/14 & 21/05.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS
A gleeful translation of the film to the musical stage, with a good-natured score by David Yazbek and a comic engine revved by Jeffrey Lane's perky book. The penny-ante American con man Freddy Benson (Norbert Leo Butz) joins forces with the swank European hustler Lawrence Jameson (the charming John Lithgow). The musical owes a lot of its twinkle to the cunning and the command of its agile director, Jack O'Brien, who has had hits in recent years with "The Full Monty" and "Hairspray." "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" makes it a trifecta of triumphs. (3/14/05) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE FOREVER WALTZ
A retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth by Glyn Maxwell—the poet, playwright, and current poetry editor of *The New Republic*—is presented by the Workshop Theatre Company. Directed by Elysa Marden. (312 W. 36th St. 212-695-4173.)

THE GERMANS IN PARIS
A new comedy about Franco-German relations by Jonathan Leaf ("Pushkin") has nothing to do with the Occupation. Set in 1843, it imagines the friendship between Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, and Richard Wagner. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 26.)

GORILLA MAN
In a new rock musical by Kyle Jarrow ("A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant"), a teen-age boy discovers the secret of his parentage. Directed by Habib Azar. With Jarrow on piano. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. Through March 27.)

HOUSE/LIGHTS
Kate Valk's tour-de-force performance is the engine of the Wooster Group's revival of its acclaimed 1999 production—which blends Gertrude Stein's 1938 "Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights" with Joseph Mawra's dominatrixy B-movie, "Olga's House of Shame." Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

HURLYBURLY
Written in 1984 and well revived by the New Group's deft, high-octane cast (which includes Ethan Hawke and Bobby Cannavale), David Rabe's play is a wild, daring, mysterious brainstorm that channels the horror and hilarity of the chaotic

household of two debauched TV casting directors in the Hollywood Hills. Directed by Scott Elliott. (2/14 & 21/05) (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE
A satisfying revival of J. B. Priestley's thriller from 1937, set in a lonely Yorkshire inn. Skillfully directed by Gus Kaikkonen. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

INKY
The première of a comic drama by Rinne Groff ("The Ruby Sunrise"), about a yuppie couple and their Slavic nanny. (Julia Miles Theatre, 242 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT
Stephen Adly Guirgis's woeful courtroom drama, which presents the case for Judas, feels rushed, undisciplined, and unfocussed. What's particularly disappointing about this new production, presented by LAByrinth, with whom Guirgis has written three very promising plays, "In Arabia, We'd All Be Kings," "Jesus Hopped the A Train," and "Our Lady of 121st Street," is that it lacks rhythm in the staging as well as in the writing. LAByrinth has indulged the playwright instead of challenging him. Philip Seymour Hoffman directs. (3/15/05) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

ORSON'S SHADOW
A new play by Austin Pendleton revisits the life of Orson Welles in 1960, when he took over a London production of Ionesco's "Rhinoceros." (Reviewed in this issue.) (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

PENTECOST
An appealing but overambitious play by David Edgar, set in an ancient chapel in Eastern Europe (the lovely and convincing set is by Markas Henry), focusses on a curator (Oksana Lada) who enlists an English expert (Marc Aden Gray) to check the authenticity of a newly unearthed fresco. Directed by Seth Barrish. (Barrow Group Arts Center, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

PLAY WITHOUT WORDS
In Matthew Bourne's Olivier-winning theatrical production, inspired by Joseph Losey's 1963 film "The Servant" (which had a screenplay by Harold Pinter), a sly, brooding butler and his smug employer play sadistic power games, using the butler's fiancée as a pawn. With an original jazz score by Terry Davies. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Through April 3.)

PULLMAN, WA
A play about disaffected youths, written and directed by the playwright Young Jean Lee. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288.)

ROMANCE
The giddy sophistry of David Mamet's new play (well directed by Neil Pepe) shows how farce can work both as a metaphor for the caprice of nations and as a release from it. In a New York City courtroom, a distracted judge (the hilarious Larry Bryggman) tries to focus on the stonewalling tactics of a defendant (Steven Goldstein) while the defense attorney (Christopher Evan Welch) complains about the prosecution's aggressive cross-examination: "What is it, a 'charade,' a 'vaudeville'?" In Mamet's hands, it's burlesque. In this merry-go-round of meanings, war breaks out everywhere: in the newspaper, in the courtroom, in the legal offices, even in the prosecutor's home. (3/14/05) (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING)
James Urbaniak gives a bravura performance as the title character in this delicately scripted monologue by Will Eno, about a man troubled by thought or, rather, by the thoughts that become particularly troubling once you've suffered a breakup. Ably directed by Hal Brooks. (2/28/05) (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
The wracking tension of spelling-bee competition is turned into rollicking ironic fun in this new musical by William Finn ("Falsettos") and Rachel Sheinkin, in which each speller hams up the role of a different grade-school stereotype. Directed by James Lapine. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS
Mercedes Ruehl stars in a new play by Lanie Robertson, set in Venice in the sixties, about the life and loves of the art patron and tastemaker Peggy Guggenheim. Directed by Casey Childs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
The troupe's fiftieth-anniversary season at City Center comes to a close, capped by the panel discussion "Working with Paul Taylor" on March 20 at 11 A.M. ♦ March 15 at 7: "Company B," "Dante Variations," and "Promethean Fire." ♦ March 16 at 8: "Arden Court," "Last Look," and "Piazzolla Caldera." ♦ March 17 at 8: "Offenbach Overtures," "Big Bertha," and "Esplanade." ♦ March 18 at 8: "Cloven Kingdom," "Last Look," and "Offenbach Overtures." ♦ March 19 at 2: "Musical Offering," "Funny Papers," and "Syzygy." ♦ March 19 at 8: "Aureole," "3Epitaphs," "Dante Variations," and "Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rehearsal)." ♦ March 20 at 3: "Black Tuesday," "Klezmerbluegrass," and "Esplanade." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

RIVERDANCE
The Celtic entertainment juggernaut returns to Radio City Music Hall for a tenth-anniversary engagement. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. March 16 at 2 and 8 and March 17 at 8.)

PETER BOAL & COMPANY
Wendy Whelan and Boal perform elegant lifts in a new duet by Edwaard Liang, "Distant Cries," set to the Albinoni score. The hip-hop choreographer Victor Quijada (of Montreal's Rubberbandance Group) dances alongside Sean Suozzi and Andrew Veyette in

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The Brazilian Girls play the Bowery Ballroom on March 16.

YELENA YEMCHUK

the première of his "Soft Watching the First Implosion," a blend of street and classical dance. The program also features a new Shen Wei solo for Whelan and a rare Daniel Nagrin solo, from 1948, performed by Suozzi. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 15-19 at 8 and March 20 at 2 and 8.)

SOWETO STREET BEAT
This all-male troupe relocated from South Africa to Atlanta in 1992, but it continues to recruit dancers from its home country and to shape them into charismatic entertainers and cultural ambassadors. The dancers draw on old and new African traditions—stomping through a Zulu war dance in animal skins and feather headdresses, or pounding the floor in a gum-boot dance, wearing miners' hard hats. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 19 at 8.)

"ARE WE HERE YET?"
The choreographer Kate Gyllenhaal and her MoCo company present a program of deliberately casual, earthbound dances, set to music as diverse as Istanbul techno-rock, John Lee Hooker, and Astor Piazzolla. The theme of home is explored in the new "Reasons for Return," as performers aged twelve to eighty-one move in a broad swath of light, and in "Sum of Us," in which dancers use pedestrian movement: walking through a familiar space and taking off and putting on overcoats. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St., at Greenwich St. 212-220-1460. March 17-19 at 7.)

"IPHIGENIA"
In the director Theodora Skipitares's restaging of the Euripides tragedy, five-foot Bunraku puppets are attached by taut strings to the actors' heads, shoulders, waists, and knees. The cast members, led by Carolyn Goelzer (as Clytemnestra), speak from behind hoods and veils. On a stage deprived of human faces, the puppeteers' voices gain unusual power, and the only unveiled character—Iphigenia—becomes a magnet for the eyes. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. March 17-20 at 7:30. Through April 3.)

MOB PRODUCTIONS AND ROBBINSCHILDS
In a shared program, two companies transport viewers into spaces haunted by the past. The quintet in Sonya Robbins and Layla Child's "Half Space" moves among pieces of a hotel ballroom—a chandelier, stacks of banquet chairs, and piles of carpeting, layered like the strata of successive renovations. Mollie O'Brien's "This Is What I Would Have Felt" is darker and more abstract, shrouded by the spectre of illness. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 16-19 at 7:30.)

"MALESTROM"
The title piece of the Erica Essner Performance Co-op's program at the Joyce SoHo is an all-male dance-theatre work that demonstrates the experiences of different male American dancers. It is one of two premières in the season, the second being "Fractured Tango," an expressionistic dance that explores contorted shapes. (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. March 18-20 at 8.)

"BRINK!"
Two acts share the bill in this series at Dixon Place: Sara Juli, with her performance piece "Shadow Artist" (a parade of neuroses, leavened with self-mockery); and the delightfully silly team of Clare Byrne and Amy Larimer, reprising last year's "Horny Girls" lizard act, outfitted in green tights, Mohawks, and tails. In Episode I, the aggrieved iguanas explained that they were not merely B-movie monsters, they were triple-threat talents. In Episode II, they accuse more famous choreographers of stealing their ideas. (258 Bowery. 212-219-0736. March 17-18 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"RADICAL JEWISH CULTURE"
The monthlong concert series celebrating ten years of music on John Zorn's Tzadik record label continues with **Sephardic Tinge** and **Naftule's Dream.** (Edmond J. Safra Hall, Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4202. March 16 at 7.)

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS
Formed in 1969, the Allman Brothers band has overcome deaths, drugs, and the waning popularity of Southern rock while managing to remain one of the industry's most profitable live acts. In what has become an annual event, they roll into town for their March stand at the Beacon Theatre. The final show this year is a benefit for the Big House Foundation, which is devoted to opening and maintaining the Allman Brothers Museum, in Macon, Georgia. Gov't Mule, the Derek Trucks Band, Oteil and the Peacemakers, and Jaimoe's Jassss Band will join the Allmans on that night. (Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. March 17-19 and March 21-22 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA BAOBAB
The Senegalese ensemble brings its ebullient Afro-Cuban spirit back to New York City. Some thirty years ago, the group's languid harmonies, melodic drumming, and inventive guitar riffs kept Dakar's Club Baobab packed, but in the early eighties, as guerrilla warfare swept across West Africa, the manic beats of *mbalax* replaced the slower-paced Latin sounds that had captivated the region for decades. The group soon disbanded, but bootleg versions of its now classic 1982 recording, "Pirates Choice," spread around the world, and Baobab regrouped in 2001. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 17 at 8:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
An evening of music from Crete, with **Psarantonis,** who has been called the Jimi Hendrix of the Cretan lyra, and his five-member ensemble. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information, call 212-545-7536. March 19 at 8.)

"LYRICS AND LYRICISTS"
Dorothy Fields gave the world the lyrics to "On the Sunny Side of the Street," "I'm in the Mood for Love," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," and

"The Way You Look Tonight," among others. In "Dorothy's Side of the Street," the journalist and playwright Deborah Grace Winer, the pianist and singer Billy Stritch, and the vocalists Julie Wilson and Karen Ziemba will pay tribute to Fields, who died in 1974. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 19 at 8, March 20 at 2:30 and 8, and March 21 at 2 and 8.)

THE BLACK CROWES
After a three-year hiatus that included low-profile solo projects from the brothers Robinson—that's Chris on vocals and Rich on guitar—the Southern-rock stalwarts resume active duty. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. March 22 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 16: The tap-dancing sensation **Savion Glover.** March 17: The **Commitments,** the soul ensemble with roots in the 1991 Alan Parker film of the same name. March 18: The veteran songwriter and keyboardist **Jimmy Webb,** whose hit-filled catalogue includes such classics as "Up, Up and Away," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," and the gloriously inscrutable "MacArthur Park." March 19: The **Hothouse Flowers.** At the dawn of the last decade, these blustery Irish hopefuls seemed poised to inherit U2's mantle as Ireland's finest pop export. It never happened. Now, after an extended absence, the Flowers are back, with a new album, "Into Your Heart."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 16: The **Brazilian Girls.** For nearly two years, this local quartet has been keeping dancers at the East Village club Nublu happy on Sunday nights with its glistening mix of global electronic pop. Now that its self-titled major-label début has landed on record-store shelves, the rest of the country gets to enjoy late nights with the band. The group is celebrating the release with a national tour and a show at this sizable venue. None of its members, by the way, are Brazilian (they're from Italy, Argentina, and the U.S.), and only one is a woman. March 18: The country-rock rebel **Steve Earle.** March 19: The oddball British collective **Ozric Tentacles** blithely ignores the difference between the progressive rock of the seventies, jazz-fusion jam sessions, and blissed-out dance music. Though never a big draw here in the States, the Tentacles are a cult favorite in their homeland, particularly among the so-called Crusties (a slightly pejorative term that describes their fans' attitudes toward personal hygiene).

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)— March 17-19: **Slint** (see This Week).

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 21: Over the past twenty years, **Piccola Orchestra Avion Travel** has blended traditional tunes from its native Italy with electronic music, tango, indie rock, and northeastern-Brazilian *baião*. Now the six-piece Caserta-based orchestra, a cult favorite, brings its genre-bending avant-garde grooves to the stage for its U.S. début.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 17: **Black 47,** named after the worst year of the nineteenth-century Irish potato famine, celebrates St. Patrick's Day. March 22: The **Thermals,** a clever trio from Portland, Oregon, traffic in brisk indie rock.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (212-415-5500)—Mar. 15: **Pablo Menendez** is best known for **Mezcla,** the Afro-Cuban jazz-rock septet he founded two decades ago. The California-born guitarist has spent much of his life in Cuba, and his trademark fusion of bebop, salsa, and rock is in evidence on his first solo album, "Havana Blues Mambo," which is also full of interpretations of tunes by such masters as Thelonious Monk, Chucho Valdez, and Silvio Rodriguez.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 21: The word "exuberant" has been sitting around, making the best of it, while waiting to attach itself to **The Go! Team,** a multiracial band of young men and women from England. Every musical genre is harvested for its shining, airborne, and positive qualities: group chants from old-school hip-hop, flutes from children's music, strummed choruses from sixties pop. It's moving to hear how openly their début, "Thunder, Lightning, Strike," embraces the bright side of life, though there is just enough clangor to balance out what sounds like a non-stop smile.

PIANOS
158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—March 19: The Brooklyn ensemble **Les Sans Culottes** plays raunchy faux-French rock that's both a sendup of and a tribute to late-period Serge Gainsbourg and punchy *yé-yé* girl pop.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—March 16: The Senegalese hip-hop star **Daara J.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through March 26: The vocalist **Tierney Sutton** and her trio. Sutton's most recent album, "Dancing in the Dark," is an homage to Frank Sinatra, but she's prepared a new show of standards for this engagement.

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BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 17-19: **Lea DeLaria,** Broadway's favorite comic foil, also does quite a turn as a feisty jazz-inflected singer. At the recent Harold Arlen celebration at Carnegie Hall, she stepped in for Maureen McGovern and won the crowd over in two beats.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 17-20: The seductive vocalist **Amel Larrieux.**

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through April 9, **Betty Buckley.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through March 20: Things are likely to get funky when the all-star conglomerate **Soul Jazz II** gets together. This edition features the keyboardist Lonnie Smith, the trombonist Fred Wesley, and the drummer Lenny White.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—March 16-19: Does the actor **Danny Aiello** have what it takes to pull off a cabaret act? Any man who has shared the screen with both Cher and Madonna will at least have plenty of stories to tell. His vocal talents fall somewhere between those of two other Italian-American legends: Tony Danza and Frank Sinatra.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 16-20: A taste for killer-diller drum solos is a must for anyone attending **Steven Smith's** tribute to Buddy Rich. The acerbic wit and outsized ego of the Master will be missed, but plenty of percussive thunder will be heard in its place. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Through March 20: **Rosa Passos's** voice oozes with the sensual plaintiveness of the very best Brazilian bossa-nova singers. Her two U.S. releases, "Entre Amigos" and "Amorosa," are filled with gentle, entrancing, and generally gorgeous sounds.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 18-20: The hard-grooving triumvirate of the guitarist **Peter Bernstein,** the keyboardist **Larry Goldings,** and the drummer **Bill Stewart.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through March 20: The **Roy Haynes** quartet. Having played with Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane, the drummer Haynes could very well rest on his laurels. Instead, he takes his role as elder statesman very seriously, nurturing new talent and handing down the secrets of the art of leading an airtight small group. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The retrospective exhibition **"Diane Arbus: Revelations."** Through May 30. ♦ **"Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): The Drawings"** discovers the Flemish progenitor of the baroque in modes other than the bombastic rhetoric of his only too well known paintings. Trenchant early copies of Michelangelos and ancient statuary testify to Rubens's analytical intelligence, and late, scrumptiously flattering portraits bespeak his diplomatic subtlety. Most exciting is a truth-telling realism, apparent in great pictures of animals—ominously sulking lions, a perfectly stupid ox—and exotic persons, such as a Jesuit missionary in Chinese dress. But the show's parts don't cohere. The Walt Disney of his day, an industrialist of standardized pleasures, Rubens plainly was indifferent to anything about his art except its worldly success. Through April 3. ♦ Duccio's "Madonna and Child," circa 1300, a triumphant recent acquisition for the Met. Through May 15. ♦ **"Left Unfinished by Albrecht Dürer."** Three painted panels, believed to have been destined for an altarpiece but abandoned by Dürer in 1505, are reunited here for the first time in centuries. Through March 27. ♦ **"From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master."** Through May 1. ♦ **"The Kano School: Orthodoxy and Iconoclasm."** Through June 5. ♦ **"Heritage of Power: Ancient Sculpture from West Mexico, the Andrall E. Pearson Family Collection."** Through April 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

POP NOTES

BECK IS BACK
After making a logy album about heartbreak called "Sea Change," in 2002, Beck Hansen decided to work again with the Dust Brothers, who produced his most high-spirited and coherent album, "Odelay," in 1996. You might expect this reunion to result in an apologetic retreat from melancholy, and a valiant, ultimately Pyrrhic attempt to restart a party that's long since over. But **"Guero"** (Interscope) sums up everything Beck is good at, like an imaginary greatest-hits album. The music combines the omnivorous collage of "Odelay" and the regret of "Sea Change" without chasing hipness or wandering into its own navel. The Dust Brothers make "Guero" both luscious and slightly odd, as if a hard drive's worth of silvery, heavy sound files had been reorganized into a series of random but apt pairings.

"E-Pro" begins the album with a stomping blues-rock riff and a "na na na na" chorus that is lifted either from a Brazilian soccer match or circle time in kindergarten. "Girl" manages to invoke both the Beach Boys and the apocalypse; the infinitely hummable chorus ("my summer girl") sounds like it was written while lolling in the sunset on a small boat, but the spring-break ambience dissipates in the verses ("Walking crooked down the beach, she spits on the sand where their bones are bleaching"). Beck's capacity for this kind of sonorous verse is a felicitous match for the Dust Brothers; together, they seem incapable of doing anything unmusical. Elsewhere, Beck is more direct. "Missing" filters samba without aping Portuguese inflection or rhythms; Beck simply sings the way he's always sung, happy to leave Dadaist connotations behind and speak directly: "Something always takes the place of missing pieces you can take and put together even though you know there's something missing." Under all of the evanescent qualifiers he's been saddled with—slacker, white hip-hop, new folk—Beck is a deeply natural songwriter who knows exactly how pop is supposed to move and feel, even when he doesn't know why.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape"** surveys contemporary landscape design with elaborate architectural models, virtual tours, video, and photographs. The focus is on the reclamation of contaminated or abandoned public sites, including New York's own Fresh Kills; a shopping district in Manchester, England, that was devastated by an I.R.A. bombing in 1996; and the Hadiqat As-Samah ("Garden of Forgiveness"), in post-civil-war Beirut. Many of the projects, like Fresh Kills, will take decades to complete, but all of them have at least been started, and some, like the Lurie Garden, situated atop a Chicago parking garage, are already resounding civic successes. Through May 16. ♦ **"Thomas Demand,"** a review of the German artist's epic paper projects in photographs and film. Through May 30. ♦ **"Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection."** Through April 25. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Hugo Boss Prize 2004: Rirkrit Tiravanija."** Tiravanija, the winner of the fifth biennial Hugo Boss Prize, likes to turn his viewers into collaborators. For this project, he has built a small, narrow-cast television station inside the museum. Through May 11. ♦ **"Recent Acquisitions: Slater Bradley's 'Doppelganger Trilogy'"** gathers three of the artist's recent videos, for which he staged utterly convincing faux performances by Kurt Cobain, Michael Jackson, and Ian Curtis. Weirdly, thrillingly, the videos can play like lost bootlegs of fallen heroes. Through May 22. ♦ **"School of Paris,"** a selection of works from the permanent collection. Through May 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper."** Through May 8. ♦ **"Tim Hawkinson,"** a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions. Through May 29. ♦ **"Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe,"** a series of embellished images based on advertisements from mid-century African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ **"Political Nature,"** a modest gathering of prints and drawings by Walton Ford, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Frank Moore, and Stephanie Syjuco. Through March 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Basquiat,"** a retrospective of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,"** an exhibition presented jointly with the Queens Museum of Art. Through June 5. ♦ **"Imperial Elegance: Chinese Ceramics from the Asia Society's Rockefeller Collection."** Through May 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits."** Through March 20. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Surrealism U.S.A."** is a superb roundup of paintings and sculptures from the nineteen-thirties and forties surveying modernism's version of punk. Through May 8. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Temporarily located in the Chelsea Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—**"East Village USA."** Through March 19. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York 2005,"** a co-production with the Museum of Modern Art, gathers a hundred and fifty artists from around the city who have emerged in the past five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,"** an exhibition co-presented with the Asia Society. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MARLENE DUMAS
The South African-born artist's figures often look bruised and weary, apt representatives of her coun-

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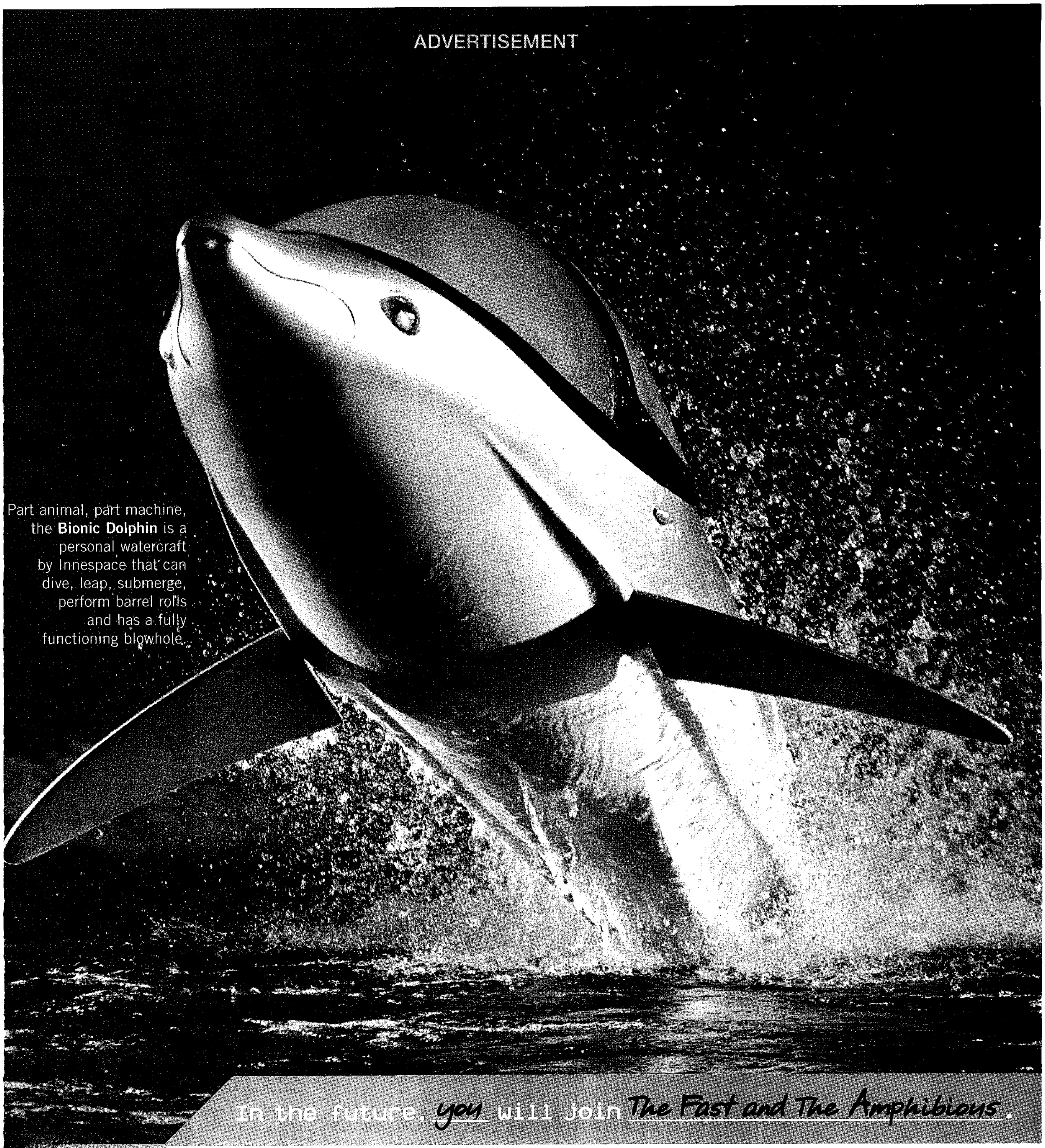
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try's long struggles. But this cross-section of nearly two decades' work offers a more buoyant and eclectic mix. Figures like the trio in "The Blindfolded" still look frighteningly faceless and alone, and the usual dark-hued torpor of her work is evident in long, vertical canvases like "Reinhardt's Daughter." Humor appears, however, as in "Ryman's Brides," with its sextet of happy women in wedding gowns. Several are drawn with Egon Schiele's squiggly style and pornographic poses, and "Couples" tumbles a faceless biracial couple across the canvas, breaking the sombre mood as well as old taboos. Through April 23. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

LANE TWITCHELL
The humble paper snowflake is taken to epic extremes in Twitchell's abstract paintings. Embedded under layers of acrylic polymer are pieces of paper cut to make networks of lines and forms, vestigial figures, even little street signs enveloped in swirls of color. The lacy forms mirror each other like Rorschach blotches, opening up into patterns as complicated as Buddhist mandalas. Obsessive, and at times overly decorative, they command you to step closer and examine them carefully. Through March 19. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444.)

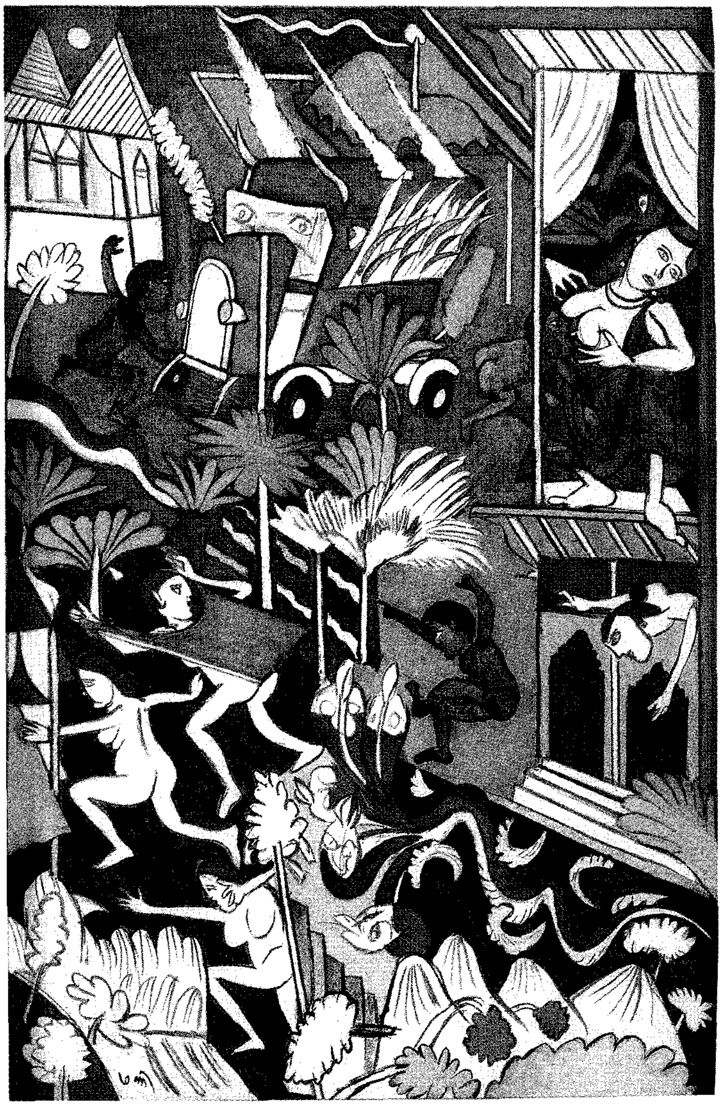
LAWRENCE WEINER
The veteran conceptualist Weiner's new work is collectively titled "En Route." A suite of wall texts in black, blue, and silver make suggestive, travel-related statements like "via another route," "on another plane," "in another court," while another group discusses quasi-scientific relationships of contiguity or exchange—"displacing by virtue of inherent instability" or "moving by virtue of inherent volition." Ampersands and plus signs—that is, the subtle differences between conjunction and addition—emerge as a secondary theme. Through April 2. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CHINATSU BAN
Acrylic paintings and sculptures of a cartoonish toy elephant floating through psychedelic pastel fields of sliced apples, big-eyed schoolgirls, and dancing underpants. Ban is a protégée of Takashi Murakami and, like him, a student of the Japanese subculture of *kawaii* or "cute"; how you feel about her acid-adorable work will depend on the intensity of your sweet tooth. Through March 19. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889.)

DEREK BUCKNER
Precisely observed rooftop views of New York that bring to mind muddied, modern-day Canalettos. A series of smaller paintings of panel-sided trucks make the planes and blocks of color even more defined. Through April 2. (Billis, 511 W. 25th St. 212-645-2621.)

BEAU CHAMBERLAIN
Acrylic-on-panel paintings that suggest bright landscapes, but in such abbreviated passages and with such curious touches—a marbleized stag's head, a psychedelic caterpillar—that the cloisonné perfection of their surfaces becomes more the point. Through March 19. (Jessica Murray, 150 Eleventh Ave., at 22nd St. 212-633-9606.)



K. G. Subramanyan's "Black Boys Fight Demons," in "Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India" at the Queens Museum of Art.

ROWENA DRING
In Dring's stitched landscape "paintings," flat shards of colored cloth are joined with tight black stitching that functions like the lead stays in a stained-glass window. The images are based on photographs the artist takes while travelling, like the lavender-hued Costa Rican "Tamarindo Beach" and dense "Emerald Forest," though "Dunes" looks more like desert camouflage than a place. "Ruegens Rocks" portrays a historically weighty location on the Baltic Sea, a subject of Caspar David Friedrich's landscape painting, where the Nazis later built a summer retreat. Through March 19. (Elizabeth Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

ROB FISCHER
Fischer's burly, poetic installation is built around a wooden walk-in construction of claustrophobic hallways. A narrow pipe runs at ear level through the fun-house spaces, simultaneously connecting and obstructing them. The pipes lead to a mini greenhouse filled with lush green mosses and to a freestanding tray of live swamp grass fed by burbling, peat-colored water. On the walls are C-prints of trailer homes abandoned in rural fields, which Fischer has carefully set afire with painted trompe-l'oeil flames and smoke. Through March 26. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710.)

MARY HEILMANN
Immodestly titled "Heaven & Hell," Heilmann's new series of blocky, abstract paintings do present some oozing blood-red shapes and passages of poisonous snake green. But the red and green are joined by bright yellows, warm blues, and plenty of white; combined with the pair of artist-designed lawn chairs set out for winter-weary visitors, the show mostly conjures summery pleasures. Through April 9. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

EMILY JACIR
Expectations run high for Jacir, a standout in last year's Whitney Biennial. She follows up her lauded photo works (in which she carried out errands and personal requests for Palestinians stuck in the Gaza Strip) with white panel paintings that painstakingly re-create e-mails that she received. Messages include angry pro-Israel rants, lists of Palestinian "martyrs," links to Arab dating Web sites, and a famous Voltaire quote: "It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong." It's another valiant attempt to communicate across the political and geographical divide, but it doesn't reach the heights of her Biennial contributions. Through April 9. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

SANDRA SCOLNIK
Surrealism meets Northern Renaissance in these strange little painted panels, peopled with self-portraits of the artist. Hummingbirds suckle on her breasts in "Landscape I." Elsewhere, a crowded cross-section of a house is shaped like an altarpiece, but the apostles and saints are replaced with skinny figures inspired by fourteenth-century Flemish painting. The artist plays both servant and master in "Breakfast in Bed," wearing a Louis XVI wig to accept the repast. An unsettling, highly mannered fever dream of multiplied selves. Through March 26. (CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766.)

HEIDE TREPANIER
Seussian Pop abstractions not unlike those of Beau Chamberlain around the corner at Jessica Murray. Trepanier's vaguely organic splotches and drips are rendered in marvellous, pure colors with snap and precision. Through March 26. (Stux, 530 W. 25th St. 212-352-1600.)

Short List

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St.
212-242-7727. Through March 26.
ERIC FISCHL
Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St.
212-752-2929. Through April 23.
AMY GLOBUS
D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St.
212-352-9460. Through March 26.
DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St.
212-741-1111. Through April 23.
SARAH MORRIS
Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St.
212-680-9467. Through March 26.
"LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS: 40 YEARS OF RULE-BASED ART"
Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St.
212-421-3292. Through March 26.

PHOTOGRAPHY

LORI GRINKER
A small, moving show of work completed over the last decade by an unfairly overlooked photographer who has documented people affected by the physical and psychological ravages of war, from Canadian and French veterans of the First World War to marines injured in Iraq. Through March 26. (Alexander, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211.)

LISA KERESZI
These color photographs of a recent New York City mostly depict a place that is just out of reach. A chalkboard from an abandoned classroom on Governors Island still has the teacher's name neatly printed across the slate. Other images conjure up the same fractured, even seedy past, from the Show World sign to Coney Island's Wonder Wheel glowing, in double, against a night sky. Also on view is the ethereal début solo show by the talented Jodie Vicenta Jacobson. Through March 26. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

IMRE KINSZKI
This is a fascinating show of mostly tiny vintage photographs by Kinszki, a native of Budapest who was born in 1901 and killed at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1945. Kinszki had a pitch-perfect modernist sensibility, and his work—in which much is made of shadows on sidewalks and crazy angles—is a very welcome addition to the canon. Through March 26. (Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 212-741-4764.)

STEPHEN SHORE
In the nineteen-seventies, along with William Eggleston, Shore elevated color film to the realm of artistry. The youngest photographer to have his work collected by MOMA—he was only fourteen then, in 1961—Shore spent the years between 1973 and 1978 taking photographs throughout the U.S. and Canada, calling the resulting series "Uncommon Places." Shot with an eight-by-ten view camera, which requires a long exposure, the rural and urban landscapes, interiors, and portraits at first appear to be banal shots of ugly places. But the care Shore took in composing the shots, his camera's capacity to record minute detail, and the lost color palette of the seventies make for an invaluable historic record as well as a true artist's most influential work—just ask Andreas Gursky. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070. Through April 16.)

CHARLES H. TRAUB
The visual ironies of a few of these color photographs are so obvious, and sometimes so silly, that you wonder if you've missed something. In one, a woman seated at a conference table, her arm resting atop her head, shares an office moment with a male colleague while a model in an underwear ad on the wall behind her strikes the same pose. Other photographs, though, venture into an amusing absurdism, such as the image of a blue wading pool that completely fills the tiny courtyard of a soulless yellow brick apartment building, or the one of a mother-son team of tourists resting in Pompeii, both in red sweaters. Through April 2. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

"(PEOPLE) IN SERIES, IN SEQUENCE"
The gallery has pulled together seminal work by six preëminent photographers: Diane Arbus, Harry Callahan, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, and Paul Strand. Every piece in the show is a beauty, and you'd be hard pressed to find so many examples of important photography in one place again. Through March 19. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-8964.)

Short List

LARRY CLARK
International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave. 212-857-0000. Through June 5.

MARC COHEN
Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through April 2.

LISETTE MODEL
Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-4819. Through March 19.

RICO PUHLMANN
Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. 212-217-5800. Through April 9.

HERB RITTS
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 212-966-6223. Through March 19.

"PORTRAITS OF AN AGE"
Neue Galerie, 1048 Fifth Ave. 212-628-6200. Through June 6.

"STILL LIFE AND STILLED LIVES"
Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770. Through March 19.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
March 18 at 10 A.M. and 2: This sale of English and Continental furniture, decorative objects, porcelain, silver, and fine art is culled from Cragwood, the New Jersey estate of the financier Charles W. Engelhard and his wife, which was decorated by the renowned designer Sister Parish. Among Parish's discoveries on offer here are a Régence bois-satiné-and-Chinese-lacquer armoire from 1723, along with an early-nineteenth-century Italian Empire giltwood-and-porphyry center table, most likely created for Cardinal Joseph Fesch, Napoleon's uncle. The porcelain collection reflects the Engelhards' passion for animals; a pair of mid-eighteenth-century ormolu-mounted Höchst parrots is expected to bring nearly a hundred thousand dollars. ♦ March 21 at 6, March 22 at 10 A.M. and 2, and March 23 at 10 A.M.: A sale of antiquarian manuscripts and catalogues from the collection of the renowned bibliographers Martin Breslauer and his son Bernard. In addition to Goethe's personal catalogue of his autograph collection, the auction features several precedents, including the first monograph on bibliophily (from 1743) and, in an unrestored Gothic blind-stamped binding, the first printed bibliography (a treatise on ecclesiastical writers, from 1494). The sale continues in June. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

PIER ANTIQUES SHOW
Stella's springtime bazaar boasts some four hundred booths of folk art, jewelry, design, fashion, furniture, and much more. (Piers 90 and 92, Twelfth Ave. between 50th and 52nd Sts. 212-255-0020. March 19-20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
March 16 at 8 and March 19 at 8:30: The final performances of **"Samson et Dalila,"** with José Cura and Denyce Graves in the leading roles; Bertrand de Billy conducts. (Malgorzata Walewska, replacing Graves, makes her Met début in the role of Dalila in the March 16 performance.) ♦ March 17 at 8: **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** with Franco Vassallo (as Figaro), Theodora Hanslowe, Kenneth Tarver (in his début, as Count Almaviva), Carlos Chausson, and Ferruccio Furlanetto; Maurizio Benini. (This is the final performance.) ♦ March 18 at 7:30: Nathaniel Merrill's sumptuous production of **"Der Rosenkavalier,"** a favorite at the Met since it first arrived, in the 1968-69 season, returns with Angela Denoke, a lissome German soprano who projects vulnerability more easily than grandeur, as the Marschallin. Also with Laura Aikin, Susan Graham, Peter Rose, Håkan Hagegård, and Giuseppe Sabbatini; Donald Runnicles. ♦ March 19 at 1: A revival of **"Don Carlo"** (in the John Dexter production), with Sondra Radvanovsky, Violeta Urmana, Richard Margison, Furlanetto, and Samuel Ramey (an imposing King Philip of seasons past, now taking the role of the Grand Inquisitor); Fabio Luisi. ♦ March 21 at 8: Salvatore Licitra, whose first brush with fame came in May of 2002 (when he took over the role of Cavaradossi in what was supposed to be Luciano Pavarotti's final Met performance), returns to the cast of **"Tosca"** as a legitimate star. He'll have some impressive company in the form of Maria Guleghina (who sings the title role) and Mark Delevan (as Scarpia); James Conlon. ♦ March 22 at 8: Franco Zeffirelli's production of the iconic double bill of Mascagni's **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and Leoncavallo's **"Pagliacci"** returns with a cast that should provide the kind of vocal intensity that these verismo masterworks require. "Cav" features Violeta Urmana, Eduardo Villa, and Frederick Burchinal; "Pag" includes Vladimir Galouzine, Patricia Racette, and Juan Pons; Dennis Russell Davies conducts these often violent scores with meticulous care. ♦ Note: The Metropolitan Opera National Council Grand Finals Concert will be held on March 20 at 3, hosted by Susan Graham and featuring guest performances by Jennifer Welch Babidge and Garrett Sorenson, among others; Patrick Summers conducts. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The final performances of Bernstein's **"Candide,"** featuring two Broadway stars—Judy Kaye and John Cullum—as the Old Lady and Pangloss and two pairs of up-and-coming City Opera singers as the tempest-tossed young lovers. George Manahan conducts. March 16 at 7:30 and March 18-19 at 8: With Anna Christy and Keith Jameson as Cunegonde and Candide. ♦ March 19 at 1:30: With Georgia Jarman and William Ferguson replacing Christy and Jameson. ♦ March 17 and March 22 at 7:30: **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Lori Phillips, Jennifer Hines, Gerard Powers, and John Packard; Steven Mosteller. ♦ March 20 at 1:30: Chas Rader-Shieber's production of Handel's **"Orlando"** (loosely based on Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso") revels in the kind of goofy stage business that plagues too many productions of the composer's operas—until the end, when the triumph of war over love is brought home with devastating force. The promising cast includes the sopranos Jennifer

TABLES FOR TWO

BOUILLABAISSE 126
126 Union St., Brooklyn (718-855-4405)—When, in 1993, Neil Ganic opened Bouillabaisse on Atlantic Avenue, it was one of the few noteworthy restaurants in the neighborhood. By the time it closed, in 2003, that area, which includes Smith Street, had become the epicenter of Brooklyn dining. Now Ganic—once again in the vanguard of a burgeoning restaurant trend—has reopened close to the waterfront, a fifteen-minute walk from the old location. Unlike its somewhat dingy predecessor, here there are brushed saffron walls, stripy banquettes, high ceilings, and capacious windows.

The change of scene hasn't affected the menu, much of which is replicated from the first Bouillabaisse. Among the appetizers, the pear, poached beetroot red and adorned with Gorgonzola, is an old friend whose return will delight many. But there's a certain stodginess to the crab cake—perhaps the red-pepper aioli should be traded in for a note of citrus?—and one hopes that Ganic won't forget to try new things. His signature dish comes in two versions, the first of which, "bouillabaisse," is the more traditional, served in a saffron broth with dabs of rouille on large croutons at the edge of the dish. The other, "seafood combo," puts the same assortment—lobster, mussels, shrimp, scallops—in a tomato-and-garlic broth. Ganic eschews distinctively strong fish tastes, and, rouille aside, the two dishes actually don't seem *all* that different. The big surprise, given the restaurant's name, is the uniform excellence of the meat dishes, which include coq au vin, pork tenderloin, and lamb shank, which mingles well with its accompanying potato mash and tangy, sweet red cabbage.

Desserts include a reliable chocolate cake, a disappointing crème brûlée (more crème than brûlée), and a bizarre rice pudding—lumpy and almost devoid of sugar or any other flavor—which Ganic is proud of the way some mothers are proud of ugly babies. Happily, there is a wonderful bread-and-butter pudding, rich in currants and graced with a raspberry reduction—perfect comfort food on a recent evening as the snow fell thick outside. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $10-$19.)

—Leo Carey

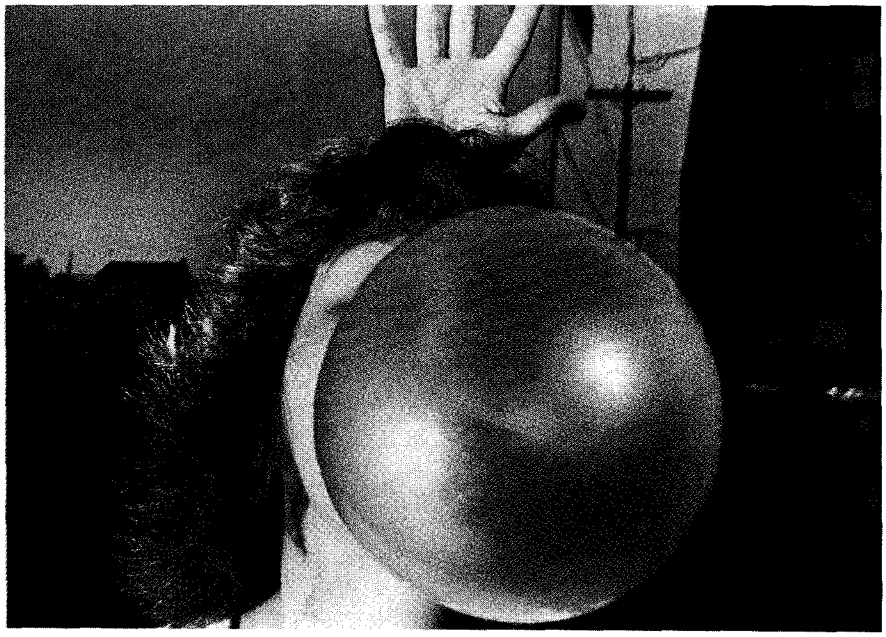
Aylmer and Amy Burton and the countertenor Bejun Mehta (who excelled in the Met's "Rodelinda"); Antony Walker. (New York State Theatre. 212-307-4100.)

"LE JARDIN DES VOIX"
William Christie leads the Orchestra of Les Arts Florissants and seven young singers in a program of Baroque arias and ensembles (see This Week). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 16-17 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy is having an exceptional year, despite the lack of any obvious anniversaries. Three weeks ago, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment offered a complete performance of the incidental music to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," along with an abridged, semi-staged performance of Shakespeare's play. Now the Philharmonic is kicking off its "Visions of the Beyond" festival with the same, directed by Edward Berkeley and featuring the actors Campbell Scott, Marcia Gay Harden, and Hope Davis; Neville Marriner, always an ambassadorial presence, conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 17 and March 22 at 7:30 and March 18-19 at 8.)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
Michael Tilson Thomas brings his luminous orchestra to Carnegie Hall. March 16 at 8: Leif Ove Andsnes is the guest in Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2, part of a program that also features Shostakovich's Fifteenth Symphony and Copland's "Orchestral Variations" (an orchestration of the "Piano Variations," a piece that established the composer's short-lived reputation as a long-haired modernist). ♦ March 17 at 8: Thomas, one of the rare contemporary conductors who is also a credible composer, leads the soprano Barbara Bonney and the orchestra in the New York première of his "Poems of Emily Dickinson" before charging onward through Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (212-247-7800.)


"1975, Bubble Gum," by Marc Cohen, at Silverstein (see Photography).

AMOR ARTIS CHORUS AND BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
Johannes Somary, a longtime player on the early-music scene, conducts Handel's dramatic oratorio "Solomon"; the soprano Julianne Baird leads the quintet of vocal soloists, as the Queen of Sheba. (Church of the Blessed Sacrament, 151 W. 71st St. 212-874-4513. March 18 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater," an unusually elegant Baroque work, was once one of the most popular pieces in the sacred repertoire. Rarely heard today, it will be expertly sung by the soprano Christine Brandes and the mezzo-soprano Beth Clayton, who join the conductorless ensemble for a concert at the Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. March 20-21 at 8.)

"MAKING MUSIC: JOHN ADAMS"
The composer ends a series of workshops with a formal concert of his music, conducting the Chamber Symphony on a program that begins with several chamber works (including "Road Movies" and "Hallelujah Junction") performed by the artists who recorded them (such as the pianist Nicolas Hodges and the violinist Leila Josefowicz). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 21 at 7:30.)

BACH'S B-MINOR MASS
The Choir and Orchestra of St. Bartholomew's Church perform Bach's masterwork; a "Mass Pass" provides access to a series of Bach lectures, offered by such authorities as Christoph Wolff (from Harvard) and Peter Schickele. (Park Ave. at 50th St. 212-378-0248. March 22 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

EMANUEL AX AND YEFIM BRONFMAN
Two old friends—the first a poetic and precise artist, the second a tumultuous Romantic—team up for a two-piano concert of works by Debussy ("En Blanc et Noir") and Stravinsky ("Le Sacre du Printemps"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. March 16 at 8.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM ARTISTS IN CONCERT
Elegantly fashioned music by Rossini (the Sonata for Strings in C Major) and Mendelssohn surrounds contemporary Eastern European works by Pärt ("Summa") and Kancheli on a program performed by the museum's young band of virtuosos. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. March 18 at 7.)

DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY
The commanding Russian baritone sings music close to his heart: songs by Tchaikovsky, Duparc, Mussorgsky ("Songs and Dances of Death"), and Rachmaninoff. Ivari Ilja accompanies him. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 18 at 8.)

"WALL TO WALL STEPHEN SONDHEIM"
Heidi Grant Murphy, Elaine Stritch, and the Ying Quartet are among the dozens of performers who have gathered for a tribute to the composer-lyricist, a twelve-hour marathon of performances and discussions. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. March 19 at 11 A.M. No tickets required.)

"BRAHMS THE PROGRESSIVE: SEXTETS"
George Steel has gathered an impressive group of soloists (including the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the violist Paul Neubauer) for the finale of his Miller Theatre Brahms series, a program combining the composer's String Sextet in B-Flat Major with Schoenberg's chamber tone poem "Transfigured Night." (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 19 at 8.)

NEW YORK WOODWIND QUINTET
For more than half a century, this group has defined great wind playing in the United States. The bassoonist Marc Goldberg, replacing Donald McCourt (who enjoyed a thirty-year run), makes his formal début with the ensemble in a program of Mozart, Reicha, Elliott Carter ("Eight Études and a Fantasy"), and John Harbison. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, Lincoln Center. March 21 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

EMERSON STRING QUARTET
The renowned quartet brings its matchless technical acuity to another in its series of Mendelssohn programs, offering his Quartet No. 3 in D Major. The pianist Garrick Ohlsson and the bassist Timothy Cobb join them for the Sextet in D Major for Piano and Strings; the evening ends with Schumann's Piano Quintet. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 22 at 7:30.)

MIRANDA CUCKSON
An enterprising young Juilliard violinist, a recipient of the school's Presser Music Award, undertakes a program of boldly colored American music by such composers as Wallingford Riegger, Morton Feldman, and Ralph Shapey, assisted by the pianist Blair McMillen and the percussionist Matthew Gold. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 22 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HENRY ROLLINS
The burly, tattooed former leader of the legendary L.A. punk band Black Flag has been the personification of rage since the mid-eighties. Continuing his second career as spoken-word raconteur, Rollins blurs the lines between poetry and standup comedy. Lately he's been visiting small towns, big cities, and military bases in Honduras, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Starting March 22, he takes a break from the road for a ten-night stand at the Zipper Theatre. (336 W. 37th St. 212-563-0485. Shows are at 8. Through April 2.)

READINGS
March 16 at 7: A night of science fiction, with Paul Witcover, the author of "Waking Beauty" and "Tumbling After," and Robert Freeman Wexler, whose books include "Circus of the Grand Design." (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 17 at 7: John Ashbery offers selections from his new collection of poetry, "Where Shall I Wander." (192 Books, 192 Tenth Ave. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 21 at 6: The poet Yusef Komunyakaa reads from his work at a benefit for Community-Word Project, a New York City-based organization promoting arts in education. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. For more information, call 212-475-3424.)

MORE TALKS
March 18 at 7: Two years after the invasion of Iraq, members of the September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows join Amy Gottlieb, the director of the American Friends Service Committee Immigrant Rights Program, for a town-hall-style discussion about the road from September 11th to Iraq. (15th St. Friends Meeting House, 15 Rutherford Pl. For more information, call 646-554-4700.) ♦ March 22 at 7: Leonard Lopate moderates a discussion between Ian Buruma, the co-author of "Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies," and Louis Menand, the author of "The Metaphysical Club," about the perception of democracy around the world. (Music Building, Queens College, Flushing. For more information, call 718-997-4646.) ♦ March 22 at 8: The playwright Wendy Wasserstein interviews the actor Gene Wilder. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

MOVIES OPENING

FACE
A cross-cultural romance, set in Queens. Directed by Bertha Bay-Sa Pan. With Bai Ling and Treach. Opening March 18. (Village East Cinemas.)

ICE PRINCESS
Michelle Trachtenberg plays a young girl who dreams of becoming a champion figure skater, in a tween drama directed by Tim Fywell. With Joan Cusack and Kim Cattrall. Opening March 18.

MELINDA AND MELINDA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 18.

THE RIDER NAMED DEATH
Karen Shakhnazarov's drama about the life of Boris Savinkov (Andrey Panin), who orchestrated the terrorist bombings that led to the Russian Revolution of 1905. In Russian. Opening March 18. (Quad Cinema.)

THE RING TWO
A sequel to the horror film about a death-inducing videotape, directed by Hideo Nakata. With Naomi Watts and Simon Baker. Opening March 18.

SCHIZO
Guka Omarova's drama tells the story of a fifteen-year-old boy who works within Kazakhstan's illegal boxing circuit. In Russian. Opening March 18. (Angelika Film Center.)

16 YEARS OF ALCOHOL
A drama about a young man (Kevin McKidd) in Edinburgh trying to break the cycle of violence and drinking in his life. Directed by Richard Jobson. Opening March 18. (Cinema Village.)

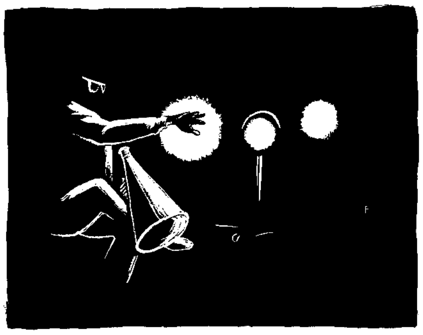
STEAMBOY
A sci-fi anime movie about an English inventor, directed by Katsuhiro Ôtomo ("Akira"). Opening March 18. (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE VENETIAN DILEMMA
Carole and Richard Rifkind's documentary examines whether Venice is a real community or a tourist trap that is sinking into the sea. Opening March 16. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

THE AVIATOR
The billionaire madman, the taloned hermit of Las Vegas eating nothing but steak and peas—that was the haggard face in the tabloids that millions of us knew in the years before Howard Hughes's death, in 1976. Martin Scorsese's brilliantly entertaining movie goes back to the period when Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) was an exhilaratingly handsome and daring young man. The narrative, concocted by the screenwriter John Logan, is not meant to be taken literally. It's a fantasia about a studly capitalist prince who produces and directs movies, designs and flies airplanes, and sleeps with dozens of beautiful actresses and starlets. Scorsese and the designer Dante Ferretti press the young tycoon into the svelte Art Deco look of the period; in his tuxedos and casual beige flying duds, Hughes becomes the pictorial embodiment of restless bravado. Toward the end, there are glimpses of the germ-haunted paranoid that Hughes would become, but the movie is consistently lighthearted and engaging, a sort of pop "Citizen Kane." With Cate Blanchett doing a nervy imitation of Katharine Hepburn, Alec Baldwin as Hughes's rival, and Alan Alda as the corrupt Maine senator Owen Brewster.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/20 & 27/04.) (Battery Park 11, Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BE COOL
It's too slovenly to be cool. This sequel to the heavenly "Get Shorty," one of the best American movies of the mid-nineties, brings back the black-suited ex-loan shark Chili Palmer (John Travolta), who, after becoming a Hollywood producer in the original, decides to take on the Los Angeles music business. The movie feels like a show-business tour. "Get Shorty" was a satirical love letter to a corrupt



milieu, but this sequel says that the music business is about money and nothing else, so the love drops out of the comedy, which descends from satire to burlesque. Vince Vaughn, however, is consistently funny as Raji, a manager who wants to be black and keeps thumping his chest and delivering such locutions as "Stop hating, start participating. C'mon, twinkle, twinkle, baby." Directed, lamely, by F. Gary Gray. From an Elmore Leonard novel.—*D.D.* (3/7/05) (Battery Park 11, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Magic Johnson Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

BORN INTO BROTHELS
Watching Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman's prize-winning documentary, shot in Calcutta's Sonagachi red-light district, where Briski lived, on and off, for years, one is initially held by the sensuousness of the colors and the beauty of the children—the offspring of prostitutes, eight, nine, twelve years old, who are growing up in the district and are surely heading into prostitution themselves. Then the "plot" of the movie kicks in. Briski gives the children cameras and teaches them to take pictures of their surroundings; they gain a sense of themselves, and they master a craft. But will Briski be able to get them out of the brothels (where their parents need them for economic reasons) and into decent schools? One is aware of Briski as a rather aggressive guardian angel from the West, who comes in and tries to save only a few children, but she's hardheaded and effective, and her quest makes sense.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

BRIDE AND PREJUDICE
Ridiculous, but immensely enjoyable. Jane Austen's most enduringly popular story done as a Bollywood musical comedy, with Martin Henderson as Darcy, a callow American millionaire, and the ravishing Aishwarya Rai as the smartly alert Elizabeth Bennet figure, known here as Lalita, one of four highly nubile daughters living in Amritsar. The ballroom scene is turned into a sprightly Bollywood production number; in the street bazaars, cross-dressers and goofy guys with turbans break into dance. It's a travesty, of course, but also an exuberant, goodhearted movie, and it won't corrupt you or Jane Austen. Directed by Gurinder Chadha.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Paris, and Union Square.)

CONSTANTINE
Lucifer's minions are illegally "crossing over" to Earth and taking possession of human bodies in preparation for the arrival of the Devil's son, who will institute chaos in the world. Our only defense: Constantine, played by Keanu Reeves, whose body looks more streamlined than ever. A long time ago, Constantine attempted suicide but escaped the grip of Hell (he was dead for two minutes but revived), and now he owes God a favor or two. The Lord's servant performs exorcisms and sends the crossover devils back to their fiery home. As the apocalypse approaches, Reeves whispers his fears to a Los Angeles cop (Rachel Weisz), and she whispers back. The movie is reverently quiet even as all Hell is (literally) breaking loose. There is an extraordinary amount of digital mess and violence—gucky melting flesh and many revelations, transformations, and immersions, as well as satanic rats and large cockroaches. Engineered (you can't really say directed) by Francis Lawrence.—*D.D.* (3/7/05) (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE DAY I BECAME A WOMAN
Like a hazy dawn that explodes into dazzling sunrise, this Iranian film from 2000, told in three linked sections, takes twenty minutes to burst into fierce, inspired filmmaking. In the naturalistic first part, director Marzieh Meshkini traces the last carefree hours of a girl's ninth birthday. In the absurdist, Polanski-like third part, she follows an old lady who flies to a resort city and buys every comfort or convenience, including a refrigerator and a living-room set. In between comes the lyrical episode that unifies the triptych: the dissolution of a marriage played out as a wife pedals desperately on her bicycle and her husband pursues her on horseback. In Farsi.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; March 19.)

DOWNFALL
The great Swiss-German actor Bruno Ganz gives a staggering performance as Adolf Hitler in this full-scale realist German production detailing the last ten days of the Third Reich. As the Red Army rampages through Berlin, Hitler and his staff have retreated to the bunker under the Reich Chancellery. They are all here—Himmler, Goebbels, Speer, the entire fascinating, loathsome crew of commanders, mad visionaries, and toadies (all brilliantly acted)—and, leading them still, a man so physically ill and constricted in movement that he looks like a broken-down puppet from a Bavarian travelling circus. The puppet comes to life, of course, in appalling self-pitying rants that are borderline funny. The entire movie teeters on the edge of sick comedy—in particular such scenes as the death of the Goebbels children, one by one, at the hands of their mother—and at times one longs for a coldly malicious ironist like Brecht or Fassbinder to come in and take over. Produced and written by Bernd Eichinger; directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. In German.—*D.D.* (2/14 & 21/05) (Film Forum.)

EARTH
The specific subject is collectivization, but Aleksandr Dovzhenko's masterwork from 1930 is a passionate lyric on the continuity of man, death, and nature. The theme is perhaps most startlingly expressed in a sequence about a man who has just celebrated the arrival of a tractor. He starts to dance—for sheer love of life—on his way home, and as he dances in the middle of the moonlit road he is suddenly struck by a bullet. In the fifties, it was voted one of the ten greatest films of all time by an international group of critics. Silent.—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; March 17.)

GUNNER PALACE
In late 2003 and early 2004, the filmmakers Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein hung out with the men and women of an American field-artillery unit in Baghdad and came back with this fragmentary but suggestive report. The movie has an absurdist framework: the company is billeted in a former palace that had belonged to Saddam's son Uday, a building that looks like a gigantic, crumbling Miami Beach hotel, complete with swimming pool and putting green. At night, in scary raids, the soldiers break into the houses of suspected bombmakers and often find nothing. Mostly very young, they are baffled and frustrated by a situation in which they are received not (as they had been told) as liberators but essentially as occupiers. Their innocence is both touching and exasperating. What right does anyone have to be so uninformed? Bitter rap lyrics, sometimes sung straight into the camera, serve as the descendant of the acid rock that played throughout Vietnam movies.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

HEAD-ON
Two people meet in the hospital, brought together by suicidal tendencies: such is the cheerful starting point of Fatih Akin's new film. Set first in Hamburg and then in Istanbul, it traces the curious rapport between the sullen Cahit (Birol Ünel) and the flaky, lustrous Sibel (Sibel Güner). In a way, theirs is a love story in reverse: they set off in mistrust, move to indifference, slide into a marriage of convenience, begin to notice and value one another, and finally ascend to a state of ineradicable need. Even

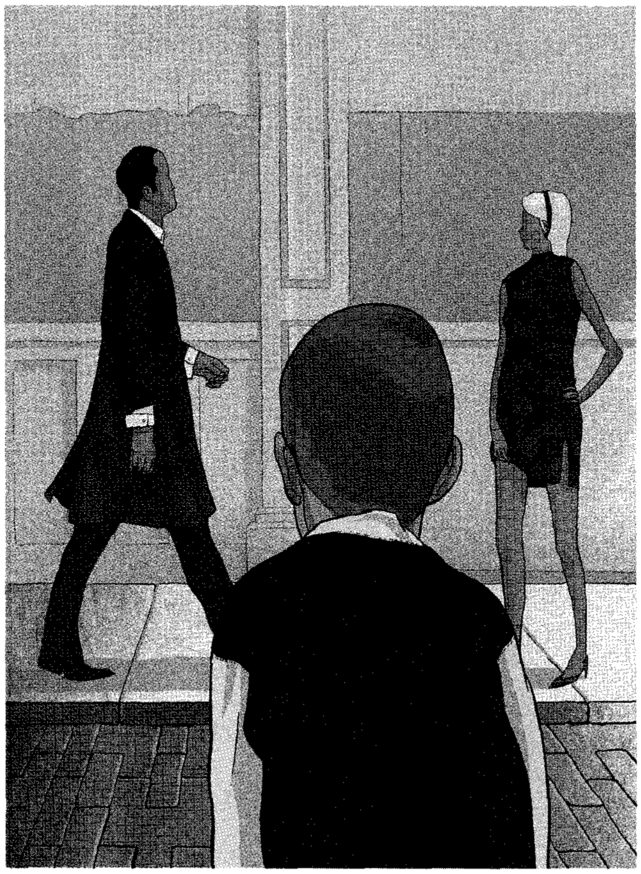
then, fortune dams their happiness; Akin's movie may be enlivened by a savage energy, but beneath it flows a quiet and rueful pessimism. He has delved into an obvious place—the predicament of Turkish workers in modern Germany—and come up with a consuming tale, forcing us to wonder why directors in the U.S. aren't turning to their own immigrant communities and finding similar treasures. Featuring fine supporting turns from Catrin Striebeck (butch and unabashed) and Güven Kiraç (benign and tubby). In German and Turkish (listen carefully for the switch between the two), with subtitles.—*Anthony Lane* (3/14/05) (Village East Cinemas.)

HITCH
Smiling at a woman, his eyes crinkling, the actor Will Smith bears an uncanny resemblance to Bill Clinton. In this modern screwball comedy, Smith exerts his considerable charm as a swift, superknowing "date doctor" who advises men of less than extraordinary appearance how to woo the women of their dreams. Some of his advice is cornball stuff, and some of it narrowly practical and probably true (if she fiddles with her keys at her doorstep, she wants to be kissed). Smith's principal student is a heavyset accountant, played by the TV-comedy actor Kevin James, who is light on his feet in the tradition of such buoyant heavies as Zero Mostel and Jackie Gleason and possibly just as talented as those two. James's scenes with Smith and with Amber Valletta, who plays a bored heiress, are full of surprises. The movie is too long for what it has to say, but much of it is good-hearted fun. Stay for the dance sequence at the very end. Written by Kevin Bisch; directed by Andy Tennant.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HOTEL RWANDA
Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), the Rwandan manager of the four-star Hôtel des Mille Collines, in Kigali, wears a blue suit and tie and is very polite, even deferential, toward everyone. Paul works for the Belgian company that owns the hotel, which has become an oasis for Europeans and for African élites. When the Hutu massacres of the Tutsi minority begin, in the spring of 1994, Paul keeps the Mille Collines running. He also, on the sly, establishes it as a haven for both Hutu and Tutsi fugitives, keeping them momentarily safe from the machete-wielding militia, who kill eight hundred thousand people in a few months. Working in Rwanda and South Africa, the writer-director, Terry George, convincingly stages the horrors outside the hotel: the paralyzing fear in the night, the vilely inciting radio broadcasts, the chaos and arbitrary madness of the slaughter. But the true drama of "Hotel Rwanda" lies in the character of Paul, who is betrayed by the Europeans who formed him but who holds to his belief in civility, right through the worst disasters. The movie is a triumph for Cheadle—he never steps outside the character for emotional grandstanding or easy moralism.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

MILLION DOLLAR BABY
Much of Clint Eastwood's evocative and poetic boxing movie is set in the Hit Pit, a moldy, sweat-stained downtown Los Angeles gym in which crusty veterans train a few serious fighters and many hapless punks. Scrap (Morgan Freeman), an ex-fighter with one functioning eye, works at the gym and exchanges affectionately nasty remarks with the owner, one Frankie Dunn (Eastwood). Against his better judgment, Frankie agrees to take on a tough country woman, Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), who, not entirely to our surprise, rapidly becomes the hottest fighter in the sordid but lucrative world of women's boxing. The story, adapted by Paul Haggis from F. X. Toole's collection, "Rope Burns," is borderline trite, but the movie has the sweet melancholy of a great jazz piece.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 34th Street Theatre.)

MILLIONS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)



Richard Jobson directed "16 Years of Alcohol," opening March 18.

NOBODY KNOWS
A long bad dream of a movie from the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda, who created the masterly "After Life." This new project takes its inspiration, loosely, from a true case of parental neglect. A young mother, with the voice of a doll, and a blank space where her sense of responsibility is meant to be, walks out on her four young children, leaving them to run their own lives. The film charts their slow decline, from the first manly efforts of twelve-year-old Akira (Yûya Yagira) to oversee a regular home to the draining away of essential supplies, and on to a final calamity. Like the children themselves, the film is immune to panic or complaint; events unfold in a patient procession of detail, and the camera's scrutiny of faces, feet, and ordinary objects is so obsessive that we seem to be following not so much a domestic drama as the progress of a haunting. Some viewers will never shake off the creepy dismay; others may find that the thickening air of isolation and implausibility leaves them nothing but numb. In Japanese.—*A.L.* (2/7/05) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

ONG BAK: THE THAI WARRIOR
After the Ong Bak (a statue of Buddha) is stolen from a small village in Thailand by an art thief, a villager (Tony Jaa) takes on the mission to retrieve it. This martial-arts picture (it features a fighting style known as Muay Thai, which looks extremely hard on the elbows and knees) follows the conventions of the genre: a gang of tough guys, a colorful ringleader, and girls with shrill voices all try to stop the hero from achieving his goal. What distinguishes this film from many others is the breathtaking talents of Jaa. Without the use of wirework, and with no regard for his own well-being, he flies through the air in feats of derring-do so striking that the director, Prachya Pinkaew, has the good sense to replay them in slow motion. In Thai.—*Bruce Diones* (Empire 25 and Union Square.)

RIO BRAVO
Howard Hawks directed this 1959 semi-satiric Western pastiche (mainly of old Hawks movies), with John Wayne as John T. Chance, Dean Martin as a drunk called Dude, Ricky Nelson as Colorado, Walter Brennan as Stumpy, and Angie Dickinson as Feathers. Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett provided the script, Dmitri Tiomkin the score. Silly, but with zest; there are some fine action sequences, and the performers seem to be enjoying their roles.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; March 16.)

THE SEA INSIDE
The director Alejandro Amenábar's follow-up to his big American hit ("The Others") is a Spanish-language film—the true-life story of Ramón Sampedro, a quadriplegic who led a campaign in favor of his right to die. As Sampedro, Javier Bardem gives a small miracle of a performance. Confined to his bed, unable to move, Bardem has an uncanny ability to express mystery and resilience. The movie centers on Sampedro's loving family and the two women who try to change his life (one supports his euthanasia, the other doesn't). The dialogue is, at times, poetic, and there's a moving, somnambulistic feel to the film—it slowly drifts asleep.—*B.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

SIDEWAYS
Paul Giamatti has no chin to speak of, a round-shouldered physique, and the nervous smile of a craven dog. He's the anti-ideal of the American male, and he's making a brilliant career of it. In this wonderful movie by the team of Alexander Payne (writer-director) and Jim Taylor (co-writer), Giamatti plays Miles, a failed novelist around forty who takes off for a wine-tasting tour with his buddy Jack (Thomas Haden Church), a washed-up TV actor who is about to get married. What starts as a last fling at freedom becomes for the two men—but centrally for Miles—a confrontation with middle age and stasis. Miles is a bibliophile, a cinephile, and an oenophile. Jack, however, couldn't care less—in every way, he's blissfully undiscriminating. On the road, the men meet Maya (Virginia Madsen), a divorced graduate student who works as a waitress, and Stephanie (Sandra Oh), a sexy "pour girl." The music and the camera setups are at times pedestrian, but the rest of "Sideways" is vivid and bitterly funny.—*D.D.* (10/25/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Beekman, Chelsea West, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

BAD EDUCATION (11/22/04)
Sunshine Cinema.

BEING JULIA
Quad Cinema, 72nd Street East, and 62nd & Broadway.

DIARY OF A MAD BLACK WOMAN
Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THE PACIFIER
Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

SAM WEBER

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Magic Johnson Theatres, Frederick Douglass Blvd. at 125th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—A Thom Andersen retrospective. March 17 at 7, March 19 at 6, and March 20 at 8:30: "Red Hollywood" (1995). ♦ March 17 at 9:30, March 19 at 4, and March 20 at 6:30: "Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer" (1974). ♦ March 18 at 8, March 19 at 8:30, and March 20 at 3: "Los Angeles Plays Itself" (2003). ♦ "Essential Cinema." March 17 at 8: "Earth" (†). ♦ March 19 at 5:30: Collage films by Bruce Conner. ♦ March 20 at 5:30: "Rien Que les Heures" (1928, Alberto Cavalcanti; silent). ♦ Preservation première. March 18-22 at 7 and 9: "The Flower Thief" (1960, Ron Rice). ♦ "Storefront Films." March 22 at 7:30: "17 Short Films by Yves Klein" (1953-62).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—"Cinema Tropical." March 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Sexual Dependency" (2003, Rodrigo Bellott). ♦ A Pupi Avati retrospective. All films are in Italian. March 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "La Strelle nel Fosso" (1978). ♦ March 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "A School Outing" (1983). ♦ March 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Graduation Party" (1985). ♦ March 20 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Stories of Boys and Girls" (1989). ♦ "Fright Nights." March 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Devil-Doll" (1936, Tod Browning). ♦ March 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Nightcomers" (1971, Michael Winner).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through March 31: "Essential Westerns." March 16 at 1, 3:30, 6:30, and 9:15: "Rio Bravo" (†). ♦ March 17 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Ride Lonesome" (1959, Budd Boetticher). ♦ March 17 at 2:30, 5:30, and 8:30: "Comanche Station" (1960, Boetticher). ♦ March 18-19 at 2, 5:45, and 9:30: "Forty Guns" (1957, Samuel Fuller). ♦ March 18-19 at 3:35 and 7:20: "Johnny Guitar" (1954, Nicholas Ray). ♦ March 20-21 at 1:50, 5:45, and 9:30: "Inferno" (1953, Roy Ward Baker; in 3-D). ♦ March 20-21 at 3:40 and 7:35: "The Charge at Feather River" (1953, Gordon Douglas; in 3-D). ♦ March 22 at 1:35, 5:20, and 9:05: "Wagon Master" (1950, John Ford). ♦ March 22 at 3:20 and 7:05: "Rio Grande" (1950, Ford).

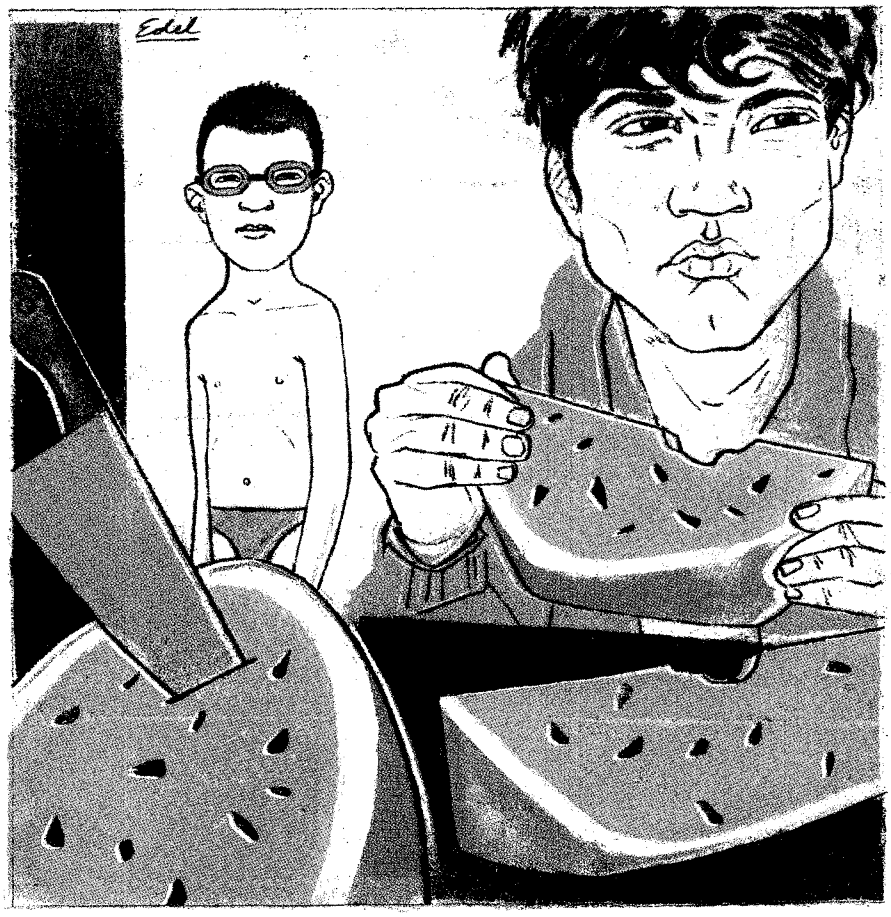
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through April 26: "Paris Series." March 22 at 12:30 and 7: "The Sign of Leo" (1959, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ March 22 at 4: "Paris 1900" (1949, Nicole Védrès; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through March 18: "Global Lens 2005." March 16 at 5:30, March 17 at 7:45, and March 18 at 8:15: "Buffalo Boy" (2004, Minh Nguyen-Vô; in Vietnamese). ♦ March 16 at 7:30: "Uniform" (2004, Diao Yi'nan; in Mandarin). ♦ Through March 23: "Canadian Front 2005." March 16 at 6 and March 20 at 2: "Sabah" (2005, Ruba Nadda). ♦ March 16 at 8 and March 19 at 4: "CQ2 (Seek You Two)" (2004, Carole Laure). ♦ March 17 at 6 and March 20 at 5: "Stryker" (2004, Noam Gonick). ♦ March 17 at 8 and March 21 at 6: "The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess" (2004, Bruce McDonald). ♦ March 18 at 6 and March 21 at 8: "Phil the Alien" (2004, Rob Stefaniuk). ♦ March 18 at 8 and March 19 at 2: "White Skin" (2004, Daniel Roby; in French). ♦ March 19 at 6: "Roger Toupin, Neighborhood Grocer" (2004, Benoît Pilon; in French). ♦ March 19 at 8:30: "Hotel Saudade" (2004, Cameron Bailey). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." March 17 at 5:30: "The Big Trail" (1930, Raoul Walsh). ♦ "Louis Feuillade: A Sampling of a Master." March 19-20 at 2: "Fantômas" (1913-14; silent). ♦ "Miramax: 25 Years." March 21 at 5:30: "Clerks" (1993, Kevin Smith).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through March 27: "Women's Places: New Films from the Middle East." March 19 at 2: "The Circle" (2000, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi). ♦ March 19 at 4: "The Ladies' Room" (2003, Mahnaz Afzali; in Farsi). ♦ March 19 at 5:15: "The Day I Became a Woman" (†). ♦ March 20 at 2: "Afghanistan Unveiled" (2003, Brigitte Brault). ♦ March 20 at 3: "Kandahar" (2001, Mohsen Makhmalbaf; in Pashto). ♦ March 20 at 4:45: "Satin Rouge" (2002, Raja Amari; in Arabic). ♦ Repertory nights. March 18 at 7:30 and March 19-20 at 6:30: "Effi Briest" (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ Peter Sellers films. March 19 at noon: "A Shot in the Dark" (1964, Blake Edwards).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. March 18-19: "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (1975, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through March 20: "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 16 at 1, March 18 at 9, and March 19 at 11 A.M.: "Me and My Sister" (2004, Alexandra Leclère). ♦ March 16 at 3:30: "Spelling Mistakes" (2004, Jean-Jacques Zilbermann). ♦ March 16 at 6: "Innocence" (2004, Lucile Hadzihalilovic). ♦ March 17 at 3:45 and 9: "The Role of Her Life" (2004, François Favrat). ♦ March 16 at 8:45, March 17 at 1, and March 19 at 1:30: "The Silence" (2004, Orso Miret). ♦ March 17 at 6:15, March 19 at 6:45, and March 20 at 9:15: "The Bridesmaid" (2004, Claude Chabrol). ♦ March 18 at 1 and March 20 at 6:45: "Local Call" (2004, Arthur Joffé). ♦ March 18 at 3:30 and March 20 at 4: "Clean" (2004, Olivier Assayas). ♦ March 18 at 6:15 and March 19 at 9:15: "The Intruder" (2004, Claire Denis). ♦ March 19 at 4:15 and March 20 at 1:30: "When the Sea Rises" (2004, Gilles Porte and Yolande Moreau).

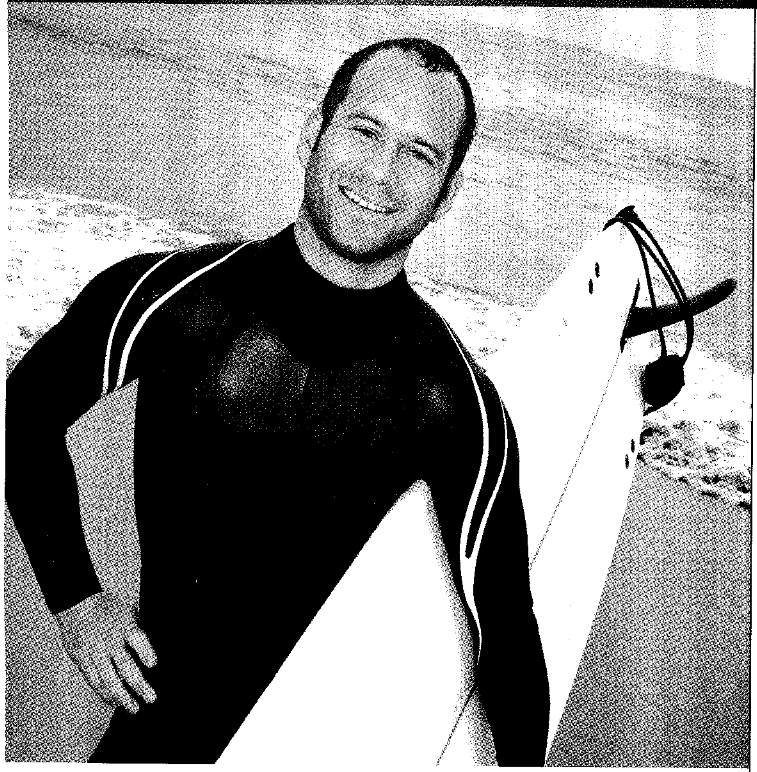


An eccentric Kazakh boy comes of age in "Schizo," opening March 18.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Turning the tide.

Novartis and Eran drove his cancer into remission, and changed his life completely.



"Cancer put me in a fight for my life. Now I'm riding the waves on one of the most beautiful beaches in Australia."

— Eran Thomson

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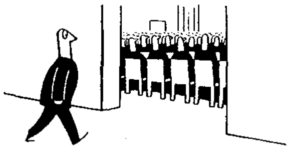
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

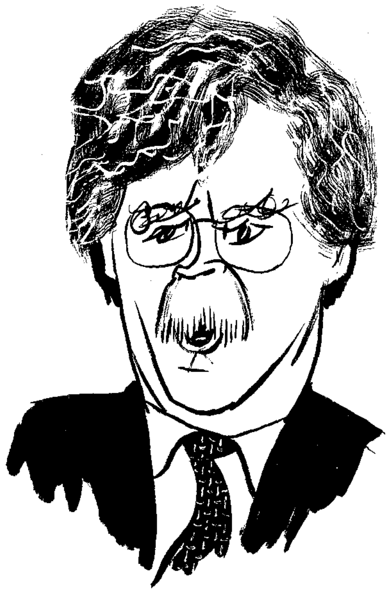
COMMENT
BOLTONISM



Barring a sudden and improbable outbreak of independent judgment in the Senate, John Bolton will soon be confirmed as President Bush's Ambassador to the United Nations, an institution he openly disdains. "It is a President's prerogative to name his ambassadors," Secretary-General Kofi Annan meekly told reporters last week. When he was asked whether he saw the nomination as a hostile act, he laughed and said, "I'm not sure I want to be drawn on that one." At U.N. headquarters, staffers walked around in a daze of disbelief. They had hoped that Bush's congenial European trip—combined with the U.N.'s moves toward internal reform and its indispensable role in pulling off the Iraqi elections—would spawn a U.S.-U.N. détente. Then came word that Bush was sending them Bolton.

"I'm pro-American," Bolton says, as if that required him to be anti-world. He dismisses the U.N.'s tools for promoting peace and security. International law? "It is a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so—because, over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrict the United States." (Never mind that such laws might have "constricted" the torture of detainees.) Humanitarian intervention? It's "a right of intervention that is just a gleam in one beholder's eye but looks like flat-out aggression to somebody else." Negotiation as a way of dealing with rogue states? "I don't do carrots," Bolton says.

It is easy to catalogue the things that John Bolton doesn't "do"—encourage payment of U.N. dues, support the International Criminal Court, strengthen international disarmament treaties. What he does do is less obvious. As Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, he has rightly been given credit for the Proliferation Security Initiative, which attempts to interdict shipments of fissile material and which is supported by sixty nations, including France and Germany. But on his watch North Korea, the chief target of his ire, reprocessed enough plutonium to make six new nuclear weapons. Bolton boasts of "taking a big bottle of Wite-Out" to President Clinton's signature on the statute for the International Criminal Court ("a product of fuzzy-minded romanticism" that is "not just naïve but dangerous"). Yet the Administration's assault on the I.C.C. has, in fact, bolstered the court's legitimacy internationally. Powerful middle-tier countries (like Germany) have helped make up the loss of American funds and personnel, and the court is now deep into investigations of mass slaughter in Congo and Uganda.



Bolton is also a longtime skeptic of tools that are increasingly part of the Bush Administration's arsenal. Nation building is a "fallacy," he thinks. "The U.S. is still engaged in nation building here two hundred and twenty-five years plus after the Declaration of Independence, and we still have a long way to go," he said in 2002. "The idea that we can nation build for somebody else is just unrealistic." When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced Bolton's nomination, last Monday, she said, "We who are on the right side of freedom's divide have an obligation to help those who are unlucky enough to be born on the wrong side of that divide." But Bolton, who stood stoically next to her, has never believed that spreading freedom is America's business.

It is unclear what the Bush Administration has in mind by shipping Bolton to New York. The appointment has been

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

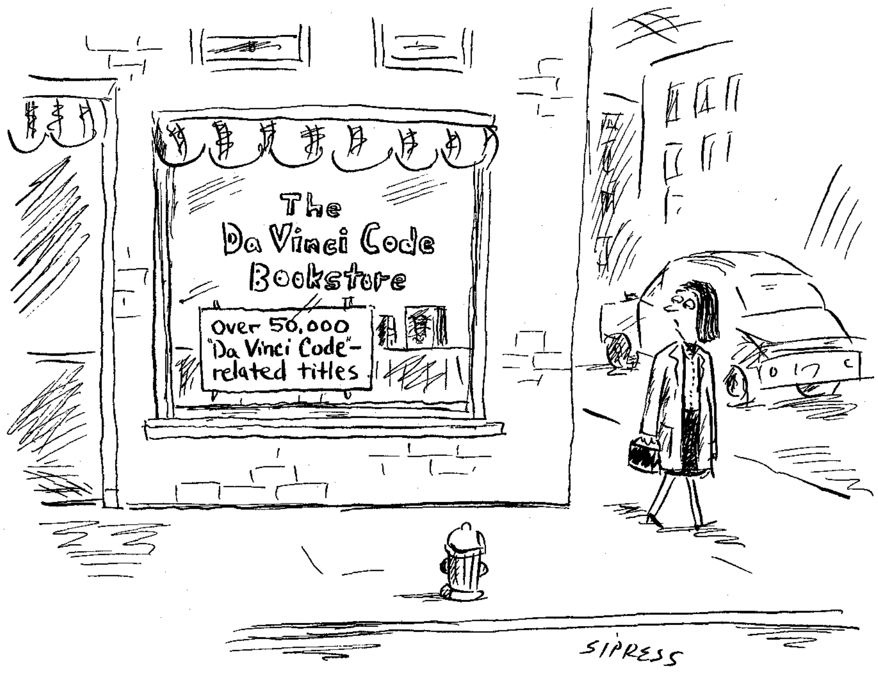
spun as "Nixon goes to China." Nixon, however, actually went to China: the visit was compatible with his world view. Bolton, by contrast, seems averse to compromise, and is apparently committed to the belief that the U.N. and international law undermine U.S. interests. If he is to be an engine for U.N. reform, he will have to jettison his core values. He will have to work on expanding the Security Council, even though, in 1997, he said, "Leave the veto alone, and leave the Security Council's membership alone." (More recently, he suggested shrinking membership to a single state: his.) He will have to work with European states, even though he believes that "some Europeans have never lost faith in appeasement as a way of life." He will have to coöperate with China, even though he has called for full diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. And, if the Administration is serious about prosecuting the perpetrators of atrocities in Darfur, he will have to allow the Security Council to refer the case to the I.C.C.

The appointment of John Bolton has the look of a bureaucratic fix for an Administration that doesn't really care what happens to the U.N. At the State Department, Bolton, a protégé of Vice-President Dick Cheney, has behaved more like a grandstander at a conservative think tank than like a diplomat. Colin Powell endured the collateral damage caused by his outbursts, but Rice made it plain that she would have none of it, and passed over Bolton for Deputy Secretary of State. Cheney reportedly then insisted that Bolton get the U.N. When Madeleine Albright and Richard Holbrooke were appointed U.N. Ambassadors, President Clinton announced the nominations. Bush did the same for his first-term nominees, John Negroponte and John Danforth. Rice, in naming Bolton herself, sent a not so subtle signal that she expects to remain boss.

Nobody is more aware of a "U.N. in crisis" than the U.N.'s senior officials. They know that the U.N. is first and foremost a gathering of states, and an organization run by the most powerful of them. To be effective, the U.N., as Bolton himself has said, "requires sustained American leadership." Kofi Annan, speaking in Madrid three days after the nomination, praised Bolton's Proliferation Security Initiative and said that the "most vital" aim of the U.N. should be denying terrorists access to nuclear materials. The Administration did not return the love: instead, Rice sent Annan a letter informing him that the United States had unilaterally withdrawn from yet another international agreement, this one regarding an international court's jurisdiction over the claims of foreigners held in American jails.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will have a lot to contemplate when the ever-quotable Bolton arrives for confirmation. At the U.N. last week, the most discussed Boltonism was the claim that if the U.N. building "lost ten stories it wouldn't make a bit of difference." One staffer sighed and said, "He didn't say which ten floors he would like to see disappear. Perhaps that leaves us some room for influence."

—*Samantha Power*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WINDSORS IN TIGHTS

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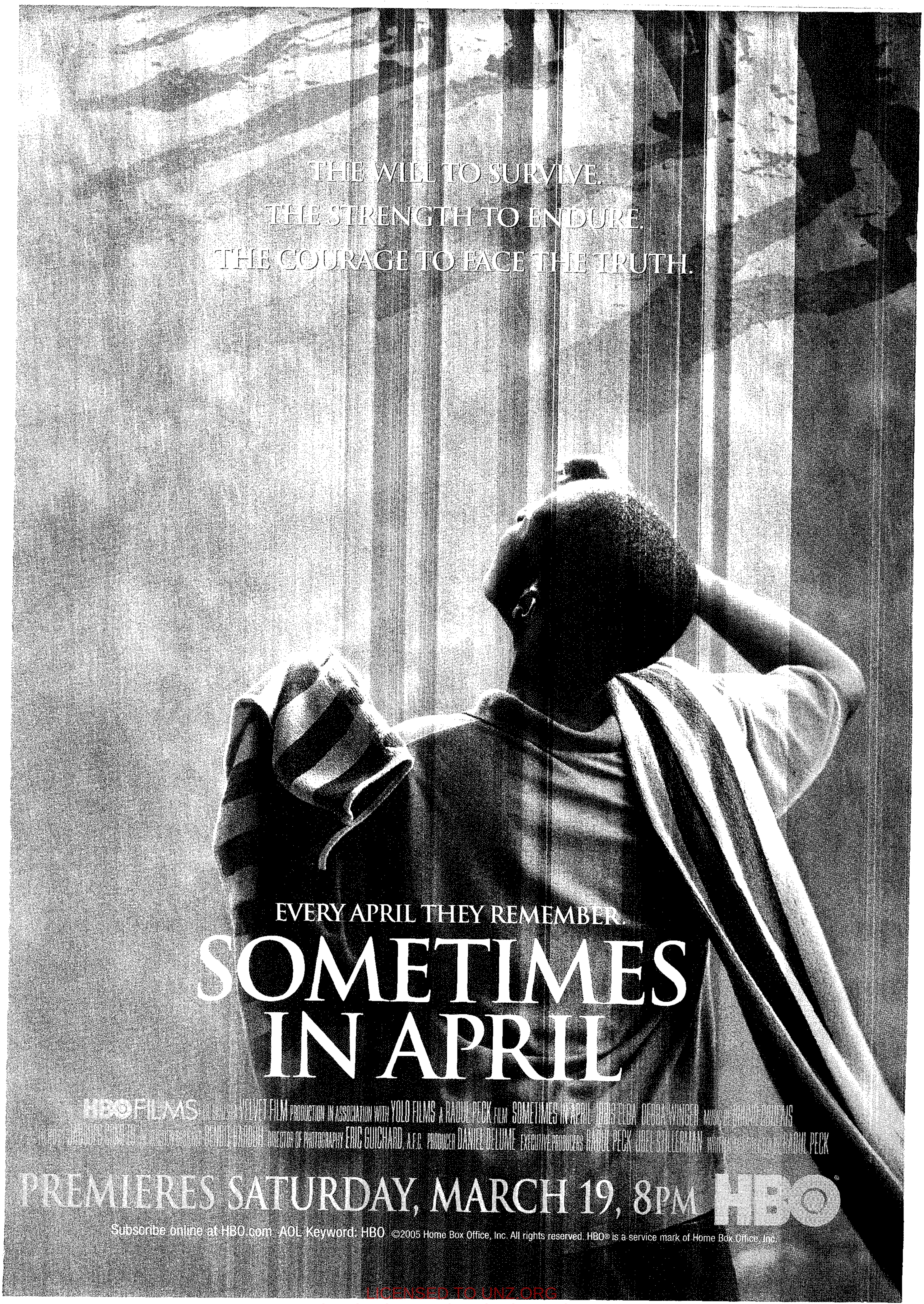
If the forthcoming nuptials of the Prince of Wales and Camilla Parker Bowles are to be celebrated in a work of art, what form should that work take? A set of postage stamps is to be issued (English stamps are adhesive these days, thus depriving squeamish citizens of the need to lick Charles and Camilla on the reverse), but stamps fall short of art. How about a life-size bronze, nailed to a plinth in Trafalgar Square? A double portrait by Lucian Freud, perhaps, with the lovers' likeness caught in an inch-thick crust of scumbled paint? Or how about this: His Royal Highness, twirling around a stage in a dark suit, his neck gripped securely in the thighs of a riding-coated Mrs. Parker Bowles, his face engaged directly with her jodhpurs?

Such was the scene that greeted the audience at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, England, in the middle of "Diana the Princess." This is the latest offering from the Danish choreographer Peter Schaufuss, who knew the Princess when he was the artistic director of the English National Ballet, and who has now dramatized the sorry, radiant story of her time in the public glare. This is Diana as she would have liked to be remembered: dashing around for an hour and a half in a tight white catsuit. On every hand, there are men and women literally dancing attendance upon her: Beefeaters, AIDS patients, paparazzi—the usual crowd. Also present are Her Majesty the Queen and her close family, each of them interpreted by the member of the Schaufuss company who bears the least resemblance to the royal in question. The last time one saw the real Princess Anne, for example, her skirt was not slashed to the top of the thigh. Then there is Martin Dutton, a spirited but slender performer who makes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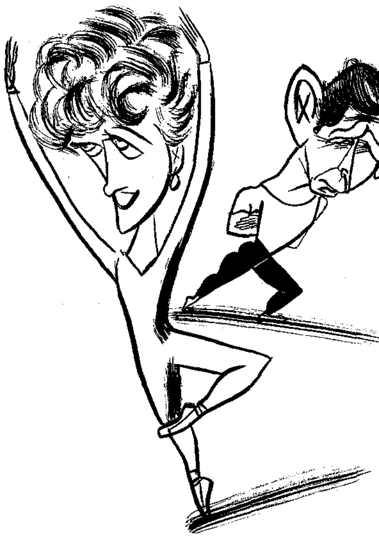
Donald O'Connor look like Prince Andrew. He plays Prince Andrew.

Most people's reaction, on hearing of this show, was one of relief: here, in a cynical world, was a chance for some undiluted, nineteen-eighties kitsch, as comforting as a girls' night in with a DVD of "Flashdance." And what did we find? An unsmiling postmortem of the imperialist power structure, gracefully choreographed and often dismayingly tasteful. The fact that so much of royal conduct is embodied in physical gesture makes it fertile ground for any dancer, and we are duly treated to a Charles who dances with one hand in his jacket pocket and to that coy, come-hither, chin-in-hands look that Diana made her own. The first half of the program, especially, is dotted with affecting moments, set to the hitherto untried combination of Edward Elgar and the Cure. Even music lovers who have tired of "Nimrod," the old heart-stirrer from "Enigma Variations," may find its strains refreshed as it accompanies what appears to be an upmarket Pilates class.

Connoisseurs of camp may feel thwarted by "Diana the Princess," but that still leaves other interested parties. Hard-line monarchists, say, might have cause to storm the stage, as Diana's claim not just to victimhood but to martyrdom is given further weight. The sight of four transparent walls descending around her like a cage will not endear Peter Schaufuss to those British subjects (or foreign tourists) who still view Buckingham Palace as a place of pilgrimage rather than as a de-facto jail. But times have changed, and the change since Diana's death has been alarmingly brisk; so much so that, according to the *Daily Mail*, there were "audible hisses in the theatre" at the première, during the pas de deux of Charles and Camilla. Worse still, "the dancers portraying the Queen and Prince Philip fared little better." If true, this was something genuinely new; once the spirit of republicanism starts writhing through the stalls of the Palace Theatre, Manchester, one of the least radical venues in the kingdom, Her Majesty might as well call the travel agent, pack her tiara, and cancel the milk.

Two days later, the threat of revolution had receded. For one thing, the theatre was two-thirds empty, England by tradition being allergic to a succès de scandale. Any hisses were by now inaudible, and the Queen was warmly applauded at her curtain call. Mrs. Parker Bowles, on the other hand, still twitching her riding crop, was met with at least one certifiable boo, which suggests that her betrothal to the Prince of Wales has not uncorked a geyser of national good will.

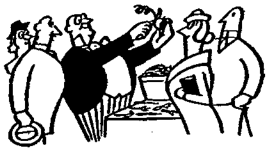
Thus far, the wedding ceremony has been shifted from Windsor Castle to a town hall, the Queen has announced that she will not be attending, and the tabloids are bracing themselves for a gladiatorial scrum. The first marriage of the heir to the throne, bearing as it did all the necessary marks of pathos, pageantry, and confrontation, was ripe for "Diana the Princess." But what of the second? What could any dance company hope to add to the supercharged chaos that is predicted for April 8th? The tale of this happy couple will not require a ballet. It will need a farce. Goodbye and thank you, Mr. Schaufuss. Somebody call Mel Brooks.



Diana and Charles

—*Anthony Lane*

STATES' RITES
YOU SAY TOMATO



Two years ago, New Jersey counted among its state symbols an official folk dance (the square dance), dinosaur (the duck-billed *Hadrosaurus foulkii*), and tall ship (the A. J. Meerwald), not to mention the obligatory flag, bird, and tree, but it had designated no particular produce for special recognition—a shameful oversight, considering that it is the Garden State.

Then came the Trenton Fruit Showdown of 2003, a legislative battle for most-favored-fruit status between supporters of the renowned Jersey tomato and those of the highbush blueberry. In the end, the blueberry lobby, a loose but surprisingly fierce coalition of South Jersey farmers and Brick Township fourth graders (they were studying state government), proved stronger, and last year Governor James McGreevey signed into law a bill acknowledging New Jersey's first-ever state fruit: "Whereas, blueberries taste good. . . . Whereas, New Jersey is widely recognized as the blueberry capital of the nation. . . . Be it enacted . . ."

This session, vegetables are on the docket, and Jersey sweet corn, more than nine million bushels of which are harvested in the state each year, has been nominated for the representative honor. The tomato, by definition a fruit, was ostensibly out of the running, until it got a boost from another group of fourth graders studying government—this one, at Marlboro Elementary, full of committed tomato partisans. No less an authority than the United States Supreme Court, one precocious student pointed out, ruled, in Nix v. Hedden, that "as an article of food on our tables, whether baked or boiled, or forming the basis of soup, [tomatoes] are used as a vegetable, as well when ripe as when green." That was in 1893, predating by three years even the adoption of New Jersey's state flag. How about reclassifying the tomato for political purposes? the kids wondered. If ketchup could be a vegetable, then certainly the tomato deserved a shot.

Ellen Karcher, a state senator from Monmouth County and the sponsor of 2003's losing tomato-for-state-fruit bill, took up the charge, and proposed the tomato ("Whereas, the famous 'Rutgers tomato,' originally introduced in 1934, once accounted for 70 percent of the processed tomatoes in the United States . . .") as competition for sweet corn. "When I go to visit schools, we have a mock election for tomato and corn," Karcher said last week. "And

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clearly tomato has pulled ahead, not only among fourth graders but in the State Assembly as well." When it comes to lobbying, corn, apparently, is no blueberry.

"I did hear from an eggplant grower who was concerned—you know, 'Why aren't you considering eggplant?' " Karcher added. The Assembly's Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, meanwhile, recently approved the tomato bill, which is now eligible for an Assembly-wide vote.

Corn vs. tomato

Red Mascara doesn't much care whether the tomato is a fruit or a vegetable, and if he were a less patient man he might have become bitter over the expedited treatment that the tomato seems to be receiving in the statehouse. For forty-four years, Mascara, who is eighty-two, and whose birth name is Joseph Mascari, has been lobbying for the recognition of an official Garden State song; New Jersey is the only state that doesn't have one. Specifically, Mascara is campaigning on behalf of his own composition, "I'm from New Jersey," which he wrote in 1960 and then recorded in twenty-seven different versions—symphonic, marching band, keyboard. Every legislative session, without fail, Mascara appears in Trenton to plead his case, passing out gumdrops around the statehouse—to no avail.

In 1972, there was a glimmer of hope: the song was ratified in both the Assembly and the Senate. Then it was vetoed in the final hour by Governor William Cahill, who, legend has it, declared, "If there is one thing worse than the song 'I'm from New Jersey,' it is Red Mascara singing 'I'm from New Jersey.' "

Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" was nominated, and ultimately rejected, in 1980, but Mascara finds little consolation in this fact. "If you're familiar with the lyrics of that song," he said the other day, "you'll understand it's not appropriate for a state song."

Mascara's lyrics are nothing if not appropriate. All of the musicians with whom he recorded "I'm from New Jersey" have since died, but he gave it his best shot over the phone last week, solo. Imagine a familiar fight-song tune and cadence, sung with a crooner's faint vibrato:

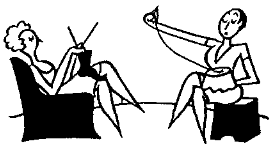
> I'm from New Jersey, and I'm proud about it / I love the Garden State.
> I'm from New Jersey and I want to shout it / I think it's simply great.

Forty-seven towns have endorsed the song. And the acting governor, Richard Codey, apparently does not share Cahill's disdain; he sponsored a bill in 2002 to give Red Mascara his due.

Mascara, who is a vegetarian, is an enthusiast of New Jersey's produce. "I've been by the blueberry patches," he said. "I eat eggplants, and I like 'em." Tomatoes, too: "I like 'em in a salad, with a little parsley and onions. I more or less think the tomato is a vegetable, because you don't eat it like a fruit."

—*Ben McGrath*

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
STITCHES



To the well-worn list of the comparative advantages of suburban life—bigger houses, lower taxes, safer schools—the inhabitants of Westchester County have recently added another: better knitting. For this civic coup they can thank Kevin Lundeen and Elise Goldschlag, who live in the historic river town of Irvington and are the proprietors of Flying Fingers, a yarn store that carries hard-to-find brands like Brownsheep ("Dyed for Ewe!") and Manos of Uruguay, along with notions and such hobby-specific publications as "Men in Knits: Sweaters to Knit That He WILL Wear." Since the couple opened up shop a year and a half ago, their voluminous inventory has attracted customers from as far away as Canada, Ireland, and Alaska. But persuading New York knitters to make the forty-five-minute trip up the Hudson has been a harder sell. And so, to render the reverse commute sufficiently enticing, Lundeen, a former managing director at Goldman Sachs, and Goldschlag, his wife, conceived of the Yarn Bus, offering free shuttle service between Irvington and Manhattan.

The Yarn Bus is a fifteen-passenger van topped with three enormous balls of yarn and a pair of knitting needles the size of 9-irons. To build it, Lundeen and Goldschlag enlisted Prototype Source, a California company that is one of the nation's leading makers of promotional vehicles, having produced such industry icons as the Hershey Kissmobile, the Yoo-hoo Stinkin' Summer Tour Garbage Truck, and the latest Oscar Mayer Wienermobile, complete with Mustard Splattered Walkway and Official Wiener Jingle Horn. To fabricate the giant yarn balls, the designers considered marine rope (too heavy) and real yarn (prone to rot) before settling on lengths of thin plastic tubing, coated with fibreglass to evoke a fittingly woolly look. The bus cost seventy-five thousand dollars. It took six people six weeks to complete, and after being driven cross-country by a pair of college students it arrived in Irvington last month. Liz Bracken, who moved to Westchester from Atlanta several years ago and works at Flying Fingers part time, signed on to drive the bus. A retired nurse, Bracken was selected on the basis of her even demeanor and her chauffeuring résumé, which, though limited to driving her daughter's Girl Scout troop on a field trip, was still more impressive than anyone else's.

On a recent Saturday, Bracken, who was wearing a periwinkle purled scarf, along with a turtleneck and pearl studs, picked up Brian Blaho and Bevin Bermingham at Fifth Avenue and Nineteenth Street.

"We're thinking of making Flying Fingers our L.Y.S."—local yarn supplier—said Blaho, who is a legal librarian and has a penchant, common among practitioners of the fibre arts, for speaking in acronyms. (AC Moore, having been taken over by territorial crocheters, was out of the running, as was the Internet. "I have one skein I bought from eBay that smells like some lady's Asian food," Bermingham said.)

At a stoplight, Bracken passed back a

new reality
09

the glass is half full, but that's debatable.*

the cost/benefit of sarbanes-oxley 404.

Sarbanes-Oxley Section 404 requires public companies to attest to the effectiveness of their internal controls over financial reporting.

As we await the first 404 reports, the debate has heated up a notch about whether these reports will have any impact on the level of confidence investors have in the financial reporting from public companies.

Possibly the greatest concern about Section 404 coming from those deep in the compliance process is the cost of the work in both time and money. Many companies are looking at this cost and are candidly questioning whether there's a corresponding benefit.

And that really cuts to the core of the 404 debate: will all this be worth the effort? Part of the answer will come when the reports are released and investors respond. Will they see value in this new information? Will these reports help rebuild investor confidence?

We are hopeful that investors will spend the time to understand the relevance and benefits of these reports. We have attempted in past communications to frame how this information may contribute to better decisions. In addition, the Big 4 firms have co-authored two investor guides to 404 that help explain what much of this means. (Both investor guides can be accessed at www.s-oxinternalcontrolinfo.com)

Two things that investors should take great comfort in are the significant attention and effort being given to internal controls by companies and auditors.

Never across corporate America has there been such an intense focus on examining whether the appropriate internal controls over financial reporting are in place and are functioning. 404 is an opportunity for a company to document and test its internal controls over financial reporting *before* problems happen. This is the chance to find weaknesses and correct them. Our experience in the marketplace is that this is happening. Many issues have been identified and have been or will be remediated.

This should be good news to investors *and* corporate management. CEOs and CFOs are now living in a world where they have new responsibilities for financial reporting. One CEO recently framed the situation in purely human terms: "This is the legislation that will let me sleep better at night."

But maybe a good night's sleep should cost less. And this is an issue that certainly can be explored in the coming months. What enhancements can be made to the 404 standard? What efficiencies can be gained?

An immediate and robust post-mortem on this first 404 effort by all those involved in the financial reporting process can answer some of the questions as well as identify best practices. But to see the real impact of 404 – improved investor confidence evidenced by a better capital allocation process – will take more than a few months.

In reality, it is too soon to decide whether the glass is half full or half empty. 404 simply needs time to work. We are confident that as 404 costs come down; as regulators, auditors, and companies refine and improve the process; as investors begin to digest this new perspective and assess its value, the water level will surely rise.

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basket of yarn and two pairs of size-13 purple needles, on the house.

"Brian, I may be able to create something magical by the time we get to Flying Fingers," Bermingham said. She started in on a grape-colored hank.

"I'm working on a rose-trellis felted bag for my sister, for her birthday. It's from *Vogue Knitting*, and the pictures make it look absolutely astounding," Blaho said. "Today, I'm looking for yarn for boot socks. You have to use something called double-pointed needles, which is like knitting with a fistful of pickup sticks, using dental floss."

"This is sock month for us," Bermingham said.

There was ice on the boulders lining the Saw Mill Parkway, and the terrain was starting to turn hilly.

"Just F.Y.I., you can do socks on two circular needles," Bracken chimed in.

"I'm very anxious to learn that, but I feel like I should do it on the D.P.N.s once to figure it out," Blaho said.

"Liz, can you turn the heat down?" Bermingham asked.

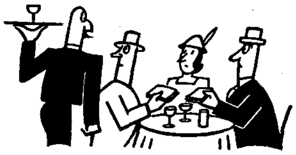
A few minutes later, Bracken stopped in front of Flying Fingers, where she would wait for an hour and fifteen minutes before setting out on a second round.

"I didn't really think I'd be driving a Yarn Bus and working ten-hour days," she admitted on the way back to the city. This time, her passengers upriver included three officemates from Rockefeller University, one of whom was taking some time off from needlepoint. As Bracken prepared to pull away from Bloomingdale's, her first stop, she squinted into the rearview mirror and asked, in a cheerful voice, "Can you look and make sure my needles aren't caught in that tree?"

—*Lauren Collins*

DECISIONS DEPT.

CHECK, PLEASE!



Diners browsing their options on Macdougal Street who happened upon a restaurant called Babu in its first few weeks of opening, earlier this year, were met with several surprises. The first was the incongruity of finding a place like Babu—which is candlelit and hushed—in a strip of the Village better known for falafels and Formica tables. The second was the unfamiliarity of the cuisine, which comes from Calcutta and draws upon the traditions of the many different ethnic groups that have made that city their home, from the Chinese (shrimp toasts with sesame) to the Muslim (mutton cooked with yogurt) to the Bengali (fish steamed with mustard and green chili, wrapped in a banana leaf) to the British (fish-and-chips).

The third surprise was that the menu came without prices. Instead, guests were invited to eat, enjoy, and then, at the end of the meal, pay what they thought it was worth. "I'd rather work out the kinks in the kitchen first," Payal Saha, the restaurant's owner, explained the other day, sitting at a corner table of Babu, which was about a quarter full of couples quietly eating and mentally calculating the value of their experience.

Saha, who is thirty and a native of Calcutta, moved to New York from Bombay in 2000 with her husband, who works in advertising and also serves as Babu's informal maître d'. "I don't have the money to hire top-line staff, so everyone has to learn," Saha said. "And it leaves a bad taste in people's mouths if they have to pay and things don't go right." (The wine and liquor list does come with prices, and a check is delivered for them.) "I have assumed that everyone will pay me zero," she said.

The pay-what-you-like policy has caused a certain amount of anxiety among diners, much as the pay-what-you-wish policy at, say, the Metropolitan Museum can cause crises of conscience in the face of a ticket-taking docent's all-knowing gaze. Only the gauche or exploitative would interpret such an invitation as an opportunity to feed for free; the problem, for the civilized remainder, is the lack of an established code of behavior to follow. The standard meaning, in movies and cartoons, at least, of a missing price tag—if you have to ask, you can't afford it—is clearly not the governing principle at Babu; but figuring out what the governing principle is is rather like trying to determine the correct size of a doorman's Christmas tip. Should diners permit themselves a discount in exchange for being experimented upon, even if the experiment was pleasurable? (Did Pavlov's dogs feel bad about enjoying the food they got in exchange for salivating on demand?) Or should diners show their appreciation for Saha's humility with a reciprocal gesture of effusiveness? Totalling up imagined prices can certainly take up a good portion of the meal, and if you happen to appreciate Babu's culinary adventurousness it is quite possible to conclude an evening at table with a consensus, over the do-it-yourself check, that the place is excellent but a little expensive.

"The no-prices menu puts people on the spot, and a lot of people got free meals," said Ursila Jung, a friend of Saha who has been helping out. A rowdy group of ten young Indians walked in one Friday evening and occupied the restaurant's large central table. Their response to no prices was to leave no money; they didn't even tip the wait staff.

Other diners have been irrepressibly generous. "We had one couple who paid two hundred bucks for an eighty-dollar meal," Saha said. (When customers overpay, Saha tries to persuade them to take some money back; none, so far, have accepted.) She admits that there is a "moment of awkwardness" when the no-prices policy is explained. "After that, some people order more food than you think they might have and some order less," she said. "We talked to some people before sending them their check, asking if they would pay fifty dollars for this meal," Jung said. "The people mostly said yes, except for one couple from Minneapolis. They were shocked at that price."

Saha says that the experiment had its stresses for her as well. While she has enjoyed circulating among the tables as her guests ate, she said, "I run into the kitchen as soon as the check comes. It's really hard for me, and it's really hard for them." A few weeks ago, prices were finally written into the menu: a three-course meal with wine comes to about fifty dollars a head. The value of having someone else do the math is, as MasterCard might put it, priceless.

—*Rebecca Mead*

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march 5 – june 6 2005

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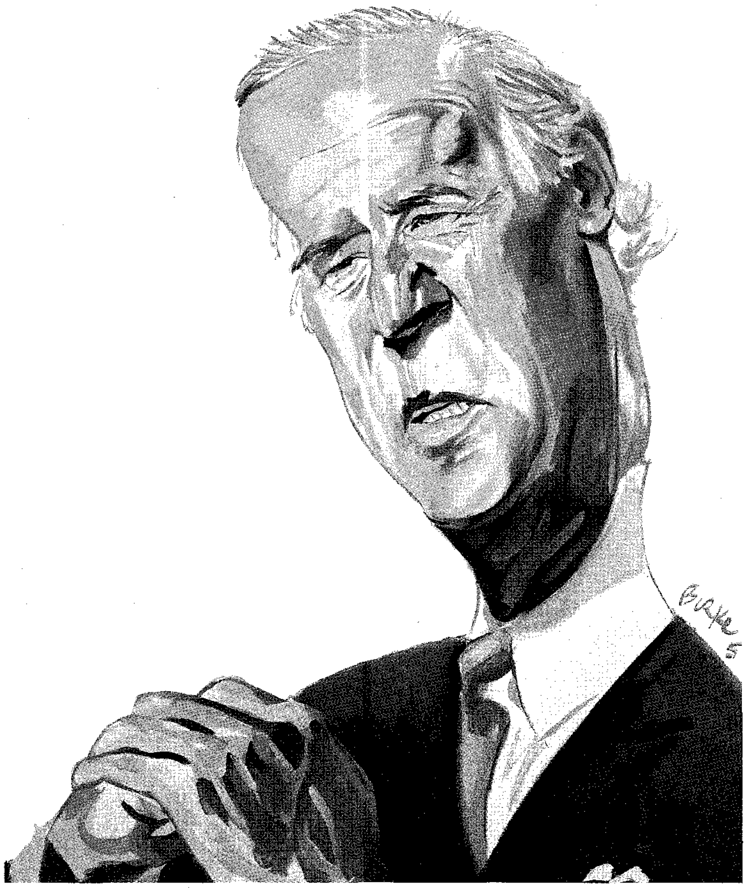
LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE UNBRANDING

Can the Democrats make themselves look tough?

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

Joseph Biden, the senior senator from Delaware, is the Democratic Party's main spokesman on international affairs; he is also a man who, on occasion, seems not to know, when sentences leave his mouth, where they are going or what they are meant to convey. Sometimes, when he thinks that he may shock or amuse his listener, he begins by stating, "I'm going to get in trouble if I say this," or, "This is a really outrageous thing to say, but . . . " And so when I asked Biden, as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and one of John Kerry's chief advisers on foreign policy during last year's Presidential campaign, what advice he gave Kerry on how to convince voters that he was tough, Biden laughed and said, "I wish I could tell you. I wish I could tell you." Then he told me.



Senator Joseph Biden's views on Iraq reveal the dilemma of his party.

At sixty-two, Biden has a cheerful vanity and an exuberant restlessness that make him seem far younger. Since the election, he has become a leader of a modest-sized faction—"the national-security Democrats," in the words of Richard Holbrooke, an ambassador to the United Nations under President Clinton—that includes the most hawkish members in the Democratic Party. Among them are Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, the former Vice-Presidential candidate John Edwards, Senator Evan Bayh, of Indiana, and Governor Bill Richardson, of New Mexico, along with a number of Clinton Administration foreign-policy officials, now in exile at think tanks scattered about Washington.

Biden can be eloquent in defense of his party, and in his criticism of President Bush, but his friends worry that his verbal indiscipline will sabotage any chance he might have to win the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2008. (Biden is an interested, but undeclared, candidate.) On the question of Kerry's mettle in the last campaign, for instance, Biden told me a story that was both entertaining and illuminating but did not capture the matter with complete accuracy.

On October 29th, Biden said, he was campaigning for Kerry in Pennsylvania, the state in which he was born, when he heard, on the radio, that Osama bin Laden had issued a videotape in which he belittled Bush and promised to continue to "bleed" America. Biden nearly panicked when he heard about the tape, he said, because he worried that Kerry's reaction might seem tepid or petty. His advice to Kerry throughout the campaign—which, he complained, went unheeded much of the time—was to harden his message, to focus, as Bush was doing, on terrorism alone: to sound, in short, more like the President and less like a Democratic senator from Massachusetts.

"I'm listening to the radio," Biden said. " 'Today' "—here he adopted a radio announcer's voice—" 'the President of the U.S. said *dah-dah*, *dah-dah*, *dah-dah*, and he said he's sure Senator Kerry agrees with him. Senator Kerry, unable to resist a dig'—that's what the announcer said, that was the phrase—'said today had we acted'—I'm paraphrasing—'had we acted properly in Tora Bora, we wouldn't have this problem.' "

Biden continued, "I'm on the phone, I e-mail, I say, 'John, please, say three things: "How dare bin Laden speak of our President this way." No. 2, "I know how to deal with preventing another 9/11." No. 3, "Kill him." ' Now, that's harsh. Kerry needed to be harsh. And it was—Jesus Christ." Here Biden threw up his hands. "He didn't make any of it. Let's get it straight. None of it. None of those three points were made."

This was not quite the case. In Kerry's first comment, made during an interview with a Milwaukee television station, he criticized Bush for missing an opportunity to kill bin Laden at Tora Bora, as he often had during the campaign. But, not long after that, Kerry spoke to the press, saying, "As Americans, we are absolutely united in our de-

PHILIP BURKE

termination to hunt down and destroy Osama bin Laden and the terrorists. They're barbarians, and I will stop at absolutely nothing to hunt down, capture, or kill the terrorists wherever they are, whatever it takes, period."

Biden, apparently, did not actually reach Kerry until that night, so Kerry made this statement without Biden's help. In any case, Biden failed to recount the dénouement; leaving it out better served the point of his story, which concerned the troubles that faced the Kerry campaign and, by extension, the Democratic Party—a party that Biden hopes to see revived. It was then, Biden went on, that he realized Kerry would lose the election.

"That night, I got off that trip, from Scranton, I got off the plane, Wilmington airport, only private aircraft, get off, pick up a phone, call a local place called the Charcoal Pit before it closes. They have great steak sandwiches and a milkshake. Triple-thick milkshake. And I hadn't eaten. I'm going to pass it on the way home. They're literally sweeping the floors. A woman, overweight, forty years old, a little unkempt, had a tooth missing in the side, not in the front"—he showed his flashing white teeth, to demonstrate—"walks up to me to give me my steak sandwich. 'Senator Biden, I'm so glad you're here. I've got a problem.' And I take out a piece of paper, maybe Social Security for her mother, and she said, 'I heard you're for Kerry.' And she said, 'You're so strong and he's so weak.' "

Biden looked at me, to make sure I understood what he seemed to think was a point of considerable nuance. "I'm gonna tell you why I'm going to vote for someone," he said, addressing the woman of the story. "Look, you're working here tonight. If the Republicans have their way, you won't get paid overtime. When you stay here tonight, you're already closed. Besides that, what they want to do with your health care." Then he quoted what the woman had replied: "But you're so strong, and he's so weak. And President Bush—he seems strong."

In the peculiar vocabulary of Washington, Democrats who wish to be thought of as preoccupied with defense issues—and no one seeking elected office wants to be thought of as anything but firm on matters of national security—are frequently described by their staffs as "muscular," or "robust," or "hard-nosed," or "forward-leaning." Republicans do not often use words like these when describing their leaders, because the muscularity of the President and his partisans is assumed, just as Democrats don't find it necessary to refer to themselves as "compassionate."

The opposite of "muscular" is, of course, "weak," and it was, for a moment, surprising to hear Biden suggest—even in his marginally sly, I'm-just-repeating-what-someone-told-me sort of way—that Kerry was weak. After all, he calls Kerry a friend. (The reverse is also true: Kerry told me last week, after I briefly sketched for him Biden's critique, that he "loves" Biden and "welcomes his advice.")

But Biden and Kerry are also rivals—for primacy among the forty-four members of the Democratic caucus in the Senate and, presumably, for the Party's Presidential nomination in 2008 as well. "Weak" is a powerful epithet among the Democrats, who are still staggering as a result of last year's election, which, polls suggest, seems to have turned less on such issues as gay marriage and abortion than on the perception that Kerry and the Democrats were not quite up to the task of defending the nation. And most Democrats I've spoken to in the past month have said that this issue will be a determining factor in the next election, too. To paint a rival as weak on defense is to ruin his chance for national office. As Senator Bayh put it, "If the American people don't trust us with their lives, they're unlikely to trust us with much else."

Not all Democratic leaders agree that a credibility problem on national security exists. Kerry, for one, believes it doesn't. "The country had concluded that I was prepared to be Commander-in-Chief," he told me last week. The fifty-nine million votes he received, he said, should be proof enough that he was perceived as strong on the issue. "If we'd had a switch of sixty thousand votes"—in Ohio—"you'd have had a better outcome."

We met in his Capitol Hill office. In the reception area stood a model, under glass, of the Swift boat that he com-

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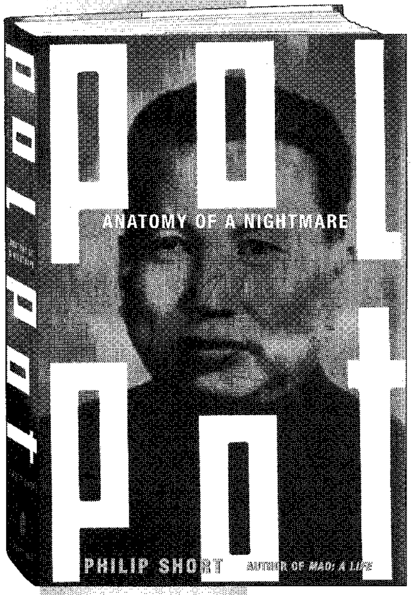
—*The New York Times*



"[Short's] text sparkles with shrewdly plausible inferences mortared into **a compelling narrative."**
—*The New York Times Book Review,* front page

"A chilling clear portrait... Short [does] a spectacularly efficient job of describing what happened and how." —*The Economist*

"Probes deeply into the background of a man who launched the world's most radical modern revolution.... **Nothing compares to the journalistic detail that Short provides."**
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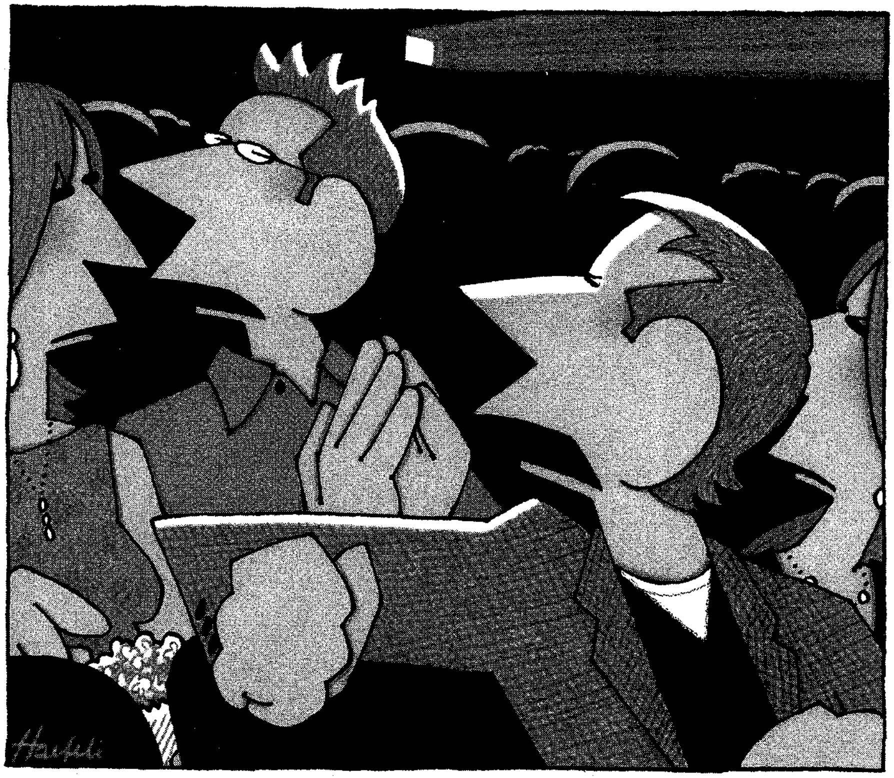
manded in Vietnam. Kerry appeared drawn and pale, but he was animated in defense of his campaign. "The bottom line is that, if you look at the data, the appearance of the Osama bin Laden tape had a profound impact. The fact is, we flatlined on that day. I presented stronger arguments, but there was a visceral unwillingness to change Commander-in-Chief five days after the bin Laden tape."

Kerry considers himself to be a national-security-oriented Democrat—Holbrooke, too, puts him in that camp—and appeared to take no particular offense at Biden's criticisms. "I'm not going to dissect the campaign," he said. But he seemed displeased when I asked whether the Democrats had a credibility problem on defense issues, and he finally said, "Look, the answer is, we have to do an unbranding." By this he meant that the Democrats had to do a better job of selling to the American people what he believes is already true—that the Democrats are every bit as serious on the issue as Republicans. "We have to brand more effectively. It's marketing."

Most national-security Democrats believe that the Party's problems on the issue go deeper than marketing. They agree that the Party should be more open to the idea of military action, and even preëmption; and although they did not agree about the timing of the Iraq war and the manner in which Bush launched it, they believe that the stated rationale—Saddam's brutality and his flouting of United Nations resolutions—was ideologically and morally sound. They say that the absence of weapons of mass destruction was more a failure of intelligence than a matter of outright deception by the Administration; and although they do not share the neoconservatives' enthusiastic belief in the transformative power of military force, they accept the possibility that the invasion of Iraq might lead to the establishment of democratic institutions there.

In addition, national-security Democrats try to distance themselves from the Party's post-Vietnam ambivalence about the projection of American power. In other words, they are men and women who want to reach back to an age of Democratic resoluteness, embodied by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy. Their mission may have been complicated earlier this year by Howard Dean's victory in the race for the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee, although Dean, the most stridently antiwar of the major candidates in 2004, has promised to suppress the urge to comment on foreign policy.


"If we'd wanted running commentary, we would have waited for the DVD."

Biden could find little to say about Dean, other than this: "No goddam chairman's ever made a difference in the history of the Democratic Party." His colleague Joseph Lieberman, who is perhaps the most conservative member of the Democratic caucus, said, "Dean was wrong on the war and what he was talking about was bad for the country. We'll see what he does as chairman. If he devotes his energies to building a party at the base, as he talked about doing, good for him. If he continues to be a prominent spokesman on defense policy, I would regret it."

Lieberman is a study in the dangers of steroidal muscularity, becoming an outlier in his own party. (He has edged to the right as his running mate in the 2000 election, Al Gore, has moved leftward.) His fate was sealed with a kiss, planted on his cheek by Bush, just after the President delivered his State of the Union address. "That may have been the last straw for some of the people in Connecticut, the blogger types," Lieberman told me. But he is unapologetic about his defense of Bush's Iraq policy, saying, "Bottom line, I think Bush has it right." When I asked if he was becoming a neoconservative, Lieberman smiled and said, "No, but some of my best friends are neocons."

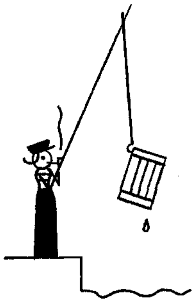
For a Democrat who wants to cultivate an image of toughness on national security, the challenge is to adopt positions that, in some cases, are closer to those of Paul Wolfowitz than to those of Edward Kennedy while remaining loyal to the Party. This has become more difficult with the news from the Middle East over the past two months, which raises the possibility that the Bush Administration's core argument—that the antidote to Islamic-fundamentalist terrorism is democracy—might turn out to be something more than utopian theory.

It is far too early to claim that the Middle East is moving irreversibly toward tranquillity and freedom. Fifteen hundred American soldiers have been killed, and thousands more have been wounded; the insurgency within Iraq—the assassinations, the car bombings, the hostage-taking—has continued unabated. But, at the same time, something appears to have been shaken loose. The Iraqi election in late January; the election in the Palestinian territories and the rekindling of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; the protests of the Lebanese against their Syrian occupiers; and the move by the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, toward more direct elections have given the Bush Administration—and the neoconservatives who contribute much of its expansive ideology—its first good news in quite a while. Some of these events cannot plausibly be attributed to Bush. "This is a very lucky President," Biden said. "Why did Arafat die on his watch? I mean, give me a break."

Biden and other Democrats agreed, though, that their party should not appear stingy when the news favors Bush. "The Democrats need to stand with the President when he's right," Bill Richardson told me. "His emphasis on being more pro-democracy in the Middle East seems to have galvanized some movement. The Democrats need to establish their credentials on national security, and we get hurt by reflexive negativism."

Hillary Clinton says that she has been "forthright in agreeing with the Administration where I thought we could agree," but she believes that the Administration has taken advantage of Democratic support—particularly in the days after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. "Joe and I and others offered our support to the President and stood unified with him in response to these attacks," Clinton said last week, referring to Biden. "The Administration saw our actions as a sign of weakness," she said, adding that it "had a campaign strategy to exploit the legitimate fears of the American people." Clinton also said that the Democrats must criticize the Bush Administration for its foreign-policy failings—of which, she said, there are many—but that they are hindered by their role as the opposition party. "It's hard to describe a Democratic Party foreign-policy position, because we're not in charge of making policy," Clinton said. "We are, by the nature of the system, forced to critique and analyze and offer suggestions." This, she said, is where Biden comes in: he has managed to sound steady on terrorism, while still being able to criticize Bush policy. "He has a good sense of smell and touch about these issues, and so I often find myself wondering what Joe is thinking and saying."

SPOT DRAWINGS BY LAURENT CILLUFFO



Biden says he is reminded of the Party's difficult relationship with Ronald Reagan. "Everybody knew 'Reagan is dangerous,' remember? He talked about freedom, so what do we do? We say it's a bad speech, dangerous speech." Biden was referring to a 1982 speech delivered by Reagan to the British Parliament, in which he spoke of the power of democracy. Today, the Democrats are "making the same mistakes again," Biden said.

Antiwar Democrats dislike the suggestion that Bush's policies will lead to a democratic Middle East. Barbara Boxer, of California, who has been one of the most energetic critics of the Bush White House (she questioned Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice aggressively during her confirmation hearing, suggesting that Rice had been dishonest in her arguments for taking the nation to war in Iraq), told me that she took "great offense" at Bush's inaugural speech. "He said that our freedom and our democracy depend on the freedom of other countries," she said. "I think that America is so strong, it has such a strong Constitution and a great history of freedom, that while we must, of course, be deeply concerned about what happens in other countries, what happens to this country is up to us. His words ring hollow because of the mess in Iraq, and all over the world. Every day, another terrible thing is happening."

I asked Boxer if events in Lebanon and Egypt had changed her views. "History will judge," she said, but added that in Lebanon "the streets are flooded with protesters today"—a reference to the Hezbollah-sponsored pro-Syria demonstration—"and you wonder if maybe a little quiet diplomacy there might have produced better results." She rejects the notion that her party is not in tune with voters on national-security issues. "We almost won the election," she said, and attributed Kerry's loss to superior Republican organizing and to Republican tactics, most notably the attacks last summer on Kerry's war record.

Ted Kennedy has called on President Bush to set an exit date for Iraq. He argued, in a speech delivered the week before the Iraqi election, that the insurgency is made stronger by the presence of American troops on Iraqi soil, and he compared the Iraq war to the war in Vietnam. "Our military and the insurgents are fighting for the same thing—the hearts and minds of the people—and that is a battle we are not winning," Kennedy declared.

When I spoke to Kennedy last month, he said that the election did not persuade him that the war was justified. He believes that it was fought under false pretenses, and is unconvinced that democracy can be brought by force to a place like Iraq. "How should democracy be exported?" he asked. "The First Amendment and food. We know how to grow it, and how to deliver it. The First Amendment is a pretty good starting point." Kennedy said that the United States does have national-security interests that must be insured by force, if necessary. "We need to keep Hormuz and the Molucca straits and the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal open." He does not, however, regret his 1991 vote opposing the first Gulf War. "I had not ruled out force, but I thought it was premature," he said. "I thought we ought to have tried economic sanctions. They worked in South Africa. It's breathtaking how fast they worked." (Kennedy, it should be noted, was not alone in opposing the 1991 Gulf War. At the time, he was joined by all but ten of the Democrats in the Senate, including Biden, Kerry, and the defense stalwarts Sam Nunn, of Georgia, and David Boren, of Oklahoma. Gore and Lieberman were two who voted in favor of the resolution.)

Kennedy and Boxer—and Dean—

are to the left of the Democratic center on foreign policy, but their views are shared by many of the Party's active constituents. According to a recent Pew poll, seventy-four per cent of Democrats believe that it was wrong to go to war; twelve per cent of Republicans opposed the invasion. (The country as a whole, including independent voters, is evenly split on the issue.) Eli Pariser, the executive director of MoveOn.org, the antiwar group that helped propel Dean's campaign for President, told me not long ago, "I don't see how Bush can create a state of fear in our country, and go off in a reckless rush to war in Iraq, and then take credit somehow for exporting democracy, which is a bizarre term, anyway, because democracy is about self-governance." In an e-mail to MoveOn members after the election, Pariser wrote, "It's our party. We bought it, we own it and we're going to take it back."

WHOMEVER

You are not even dead yet.
I saw you again this morning
in Penn Station. In your disguise.
Small, thin, elderly. Dressed
haphazardly in unbuttoned layers.
With the cane, cap, and scarf.
Unloved, but not as invisible
as you want. I don't know what to feel.
I am glad to see you sometimes.
I think there is a tenderness
in you. Like the way a bird flies.
Other times I think it is to keep
people away. Always it is unrehearsed
need. A fist of need. Never having
food put before you.

—*Linda Gregg*

By at least one significant measure, though, it is not Pariser's party. Few of the most frequently mentioned contenders for the Party's Presidential nomination in 2008—including Clinton, Bayh, Edwards, and Biden—belong to the Democratic Party's left. Instead, the most likely would-be nominees are at pains to appear hawkish on defense. Hillary Clinton has been particularly skillful—not only on defense issues but also on such sensitive subjects as abortion rights. While she has been giving speeches in praise of the United Nations and multilateralism, she has been careful to assert the right of the United States to act without the support of allies when necessary.

Biden's views on the war have changed somewhat over the last several years—an evolution that reveals some of the dilemmas faced by the Democrats in responding to Bush's single-minded message. In November of 2002, in an interview with *USA Today*, Biden recalled a conversation with an unnamed chairman of a military service, who told him that a war with Iraq would be "the dumbest thing in the world." In the months leading up to the war, he often questioned the Bush Administration's timing, its planning, and the grandiose scope of its mission. But as the invasion neared—around the time when former Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations Security Council that he had proof that Saddam Hussein was concealing an active weapons-of-mass-destruction program—Biden said, "The choice between war and peace is Saddam's. The choice between relevance and irrelevance is the U.N. Security Council's."

Biden, like nearly all Democrats, argues that the Administration's prosecution of the war has been inept. "The decision to go to war was the right one," Biden said recently, "but every decision they've made since Saddam fell was a mistake." In particular, Biden blames Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for the troubles of postwar Iraq—for the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, for the failure to anticipate an organized insurgency, and for the difficulties encountered in the training of Iraqi soldiers. He told Condoleezza Rice, at her confirmation hearing, "For God's sake, don't listen to Rumsfeld. He doesn't know what in the hell he's talking about on this."

Biden was once better known for his chairmanship of the Senate Judiciary Committee than for foreign-policy expertise; he oversaw the confirmation hearings of Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas, among others, and had established a reputation as a liberal in the mainstream of his party, and also as something of a grandstander.

His run for the 1988 Democratic Presidential nomination came to a sudden end when he was accused of borrowing, without attribution, from a television commercial by the former British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock. This embarrassment did no permanent harm to his standing in the Senate, and he has remained highly visible there. Biden sponsored the Clinton Administration's 1994 crime bill, which funded a hundred thousand new police officers for local communities and helped neutralize the "law and order" issue that had hurt the Democrats in previous years.

By the mid-nineties, Biden had become more absorbed by foreign affairs, and he was deeply affected by the cruelty he saw on visits to Bosnia during the war there. He became a missionary in the cause of armed humanitarian intervention in Bosnia and, later, in Kosovo. "I came back to the Republicans and laid out the death camps in Kosovo, the rape camps in Bosnia—I laid it out in stark relief," he told me. "These guys"—the Republicans—"said, 'It's not our business.' What is so transformational in the last four years is that these assholes who wouldn't give President Clinton the authority to use force" have now become, he said, moral interventionists. "Give me a fucking break." (In fact, there were Republican senators who supported sending United States soldiers to Kosovo in 1999, including John McCain and John Warner, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee.)

Biden says that a "small faction" of the Party is mistrustful of even the occasional use of force. "There are some really bright guys and women in my party who underestimate the transformative capability of military power, when coupled with a rational policy that is both preventative and nation-building in nature," he said. He told me about a recent visit to Los Angeles, where he met with a group of wealthy liberals and laid out the following scenario: "Assume you're the President, and I'm your Secretary of Defense or State or C.I.A. director, and I come to you and tell you we know where bin Laden is, he and four hundred of his people, and they're in this portion of Pakistan the Pakistanis won't go into, and they told us not to go in. This is going to cost us five hundred to five thousand lives, of our soldiers, but we can get him. What do you do?" Biden said they had no answer. "The truth is, they put their heads down," he said.

Richard Holbrooke suggests that the Republicans have boxed in the Democrats, by stealing their ideas. "The Republicans, who always favored bigger defense budgets—we were the soft-power people, the freedom-and-democracy people—now seek to own both the defense side and the values side of the debate," Holbrooke said. He believes that if the Iraq war actually does bring about the hoped-for results it might help the Democrats. "We'd be better off as a country and better off as a party if Iraq is a success and we get it behind us. The Democrats can then talk about their traditional strengths, domestically and internationally."

Senator Clinton said that complaints about a lack of Democratic steadfastness are "always surprising to me, because so many of the disastrous mistakes in foreign policy over the past forty or fifty years have been made by Republicans." She went on, "I don't know all the reasons voters and observers might hold that view. I think a lot of it is unfounded, so part of our challenge is to reassert our voices with clarity in the debate on foreign policy and national security."

These days, Biden is touring the country, doing something that he hasn't done since his aborted Presidential campaign, seventeen years ago: meeting wealthy donors to measure their enthusiasm for him, and accepting offers to speak to Democratic groups far from Wilmington. He is now a senior man in the Party—he has served in the Senate for thirty-two years—and, among his supporters, there is the not unreasonable assumption that the statute of limitations on the Kinnock scandal has been reached.

He told me that he won't make a decision on a Presidential run for at least two years. "My honest-to-God answer is, I'm not going to go on a fool's errand," he said. "If I think I'm the horse that can pull the sleigh, I'll do it. But if there's someone else out there . . ." He trailed off. But he didn't leave the impression that he sees an overly crowded field.

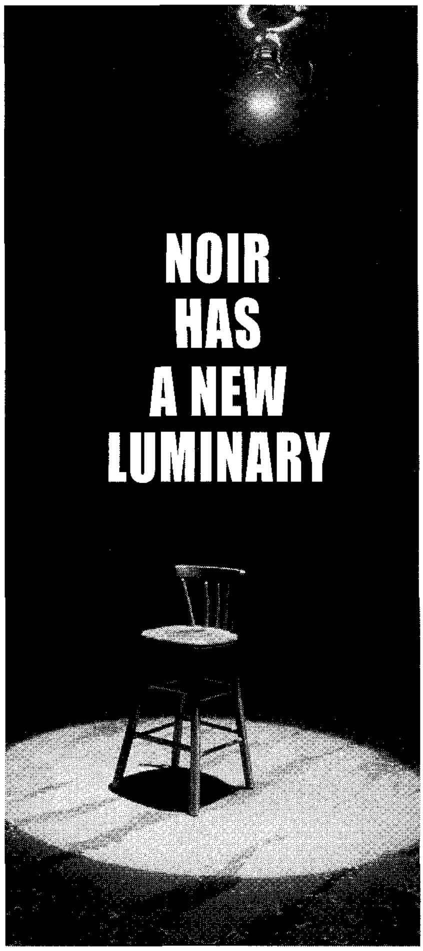
He has come to realize, he said, that many Democrats still haven't grasped the political importance of September 11th, and again he recalled how he had urged Kerry to keep his campaign message focussed on terrorism. Kerry, Biden said, would tell voters that he would "fight terror as hard as Bush," but then he would add, "and I'll help you economically." "What is Bush saying?" Biden said. "Terror, terror, terror, terror, terror. I would say to John, 'Let me put it to you this way. The Lord Almighty, or Allah, whoever, if he came to every kitchen table in America and said, "Look, I have a Faustian bargain for you, you choose. I will guarantee to you that I will end all terror threats against the United States within the year, but in return for that there will be no help for education, no help for Social Security, no help for health care." What do you do?'

"My answer," Biden said, "is that seventy-five per cent of the American people would buy that bargain." ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Times.

Mr. Espinal was treated for powder burns on his face at Beth Israel Medical Center, while Mr. Emerson was in serious condition at Bellevue Hospital Center. He has previous robbery convictions, and a weapons conviction under the name Sherlock Holmes, court records show.



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—George Pelecanos,
author of *Hard Revolution*

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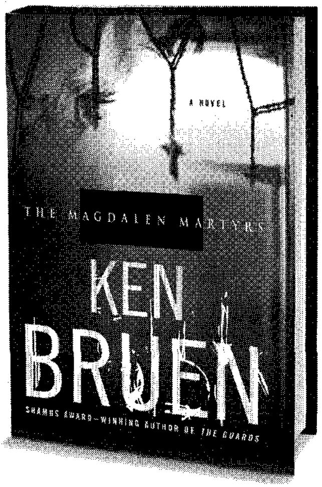

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Peter J. Boyer discusses the gray area between church and state.

Tad Friend talks about the evolution of the Hollywood agent.

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BY FRANK GANNON

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Just the other day, we were sitting around asking ourselves, "Where are we going to find exactly the kind of person we need?" This was a hard question, because our standards and specifications are stringent. We spent weeks asking ourselves this question. We got sick of looking at one another because we were meeting so often with the same people and asking the same question over and over. One of us started to ridicule another one of us for his slight Midwestern "twang." Another one of us broke down sobbing. It was a trying period. There were some pretty heated confrontations in there, let me tell you! Some of us didn't make it.

But, finally, after countless cups of coffee and cigarettes and frantic phone calls and consultations and trips to the bathroom and looking things up in the dictionary and the thesaurus and just throwing our hands up in despair, we came up with somebody. And that somebody just happened to be someone you know—you!

We know you. You are a person who appreciates life. You know how to savor the little things. You know how a good bowl of chicken soup is supposed to taste, and you're not settling for crap. *What is this? Take it away and bring me some real soup. I don't drink dishwater. Now go!* You've said that more than once.

You appreciate the opposite sex. You like them as people, and you hate it when they are treated as one-dimensional objects. They're not playthings. You hate the way they can bump into a "glass ceiling" sometimes. You hate unfairness. You've hated it since you were a child. Life is too short for a playing field that is not precisely level. It makes you upset if anyone even alludes to it. Because you know that a member of the opposite sex is a three-dimensional being whose features are composed in a pleasant way. A way that you find exciting. And you're not ashamed of that.

We know what kinds of actions you like to take. We don't have to spell things out for you. We don't think that you are the sort of person who wants everything explained. Because you already know a whole lot. You couldn't even get everything you know into a book. Forget about books—you couldn't get everything you know into a room. Unless the room is really pretty big, like a garage.

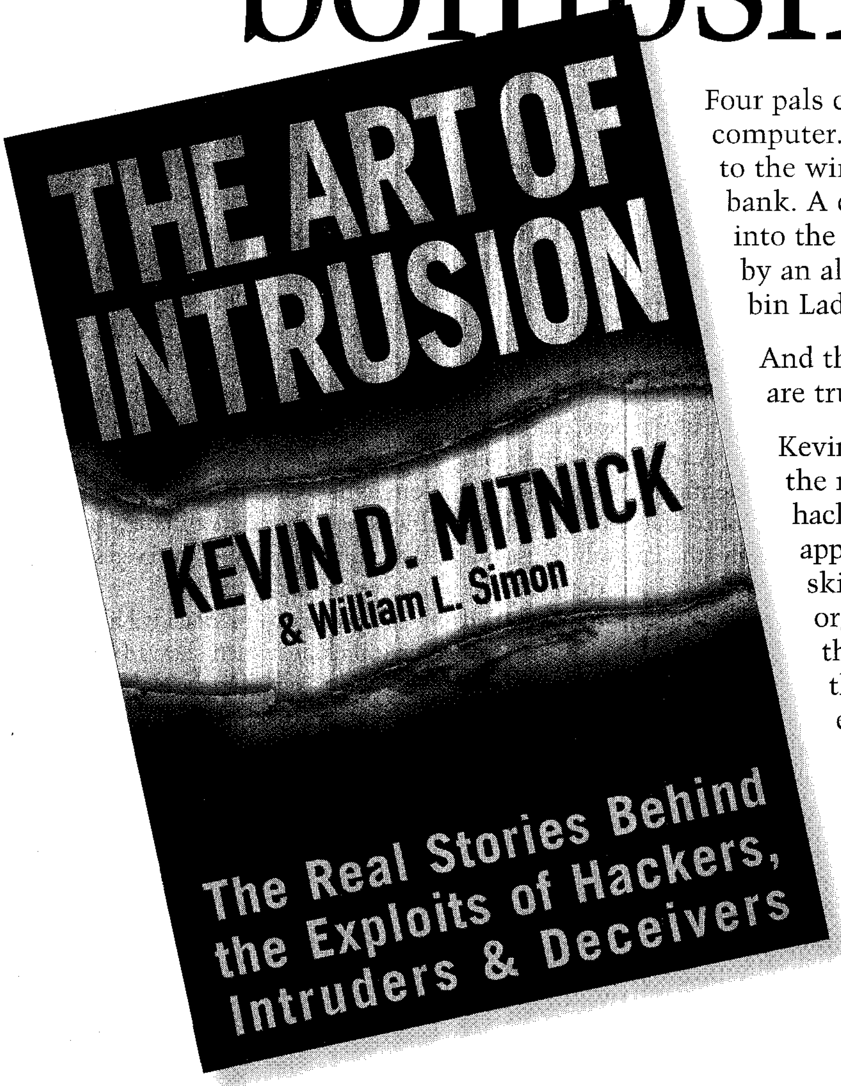
We're not limiting you. Limits aren't for you. Even the sky isn't your limit. That's why we know you're going to take advantage of our one-time offer to consolidate all of your credit-card debt into one account with one easy-to-remember card. And your wallet is going to have that "sleek" look that the wallets owned by so many of the truly knowledgeable people have.

That look isn't for everyone. Most people have huge bulgy wallets with stuff sticking out. They can't even take their wallets out of their pockets without a bunch of lint and gum wrappers coming out with them. They look like such idiots when they do that. They look, truth be told, like they have brain damage. Like they need someone to go with them and open the door for them and remind them to pay for things before they walk out with a bunch of stuff and get arrested. Frankly, that's what they deserve. Some hard prison time. Maybe that will straighten them out. It can't hurt.

They just can't own up to it, though. They say their mother never taught them the right way to act. Then they go and blame it on her. That is pathetic.

You're not like that, and I and the other people here would just like to say that we appreciate people like you. You're a breed apart. You're going to be enjoying zero-per-cent interest for the first six months. Then you will have a truly great variable rate of 9.4 per cent. But those bulgy-wallet people won't. May they rot in Hell. We hate to use language like that, but sometimes it just fits. This really couldn't happen to a better person. God didn't make many of you. We mean that. ♦

Mitnick's latest bombshell.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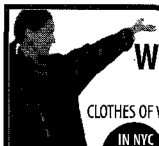

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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE OTHER SISTER

Was Nathaniel Hawthorne a cad?

BY MEGAN MARSHALL

On the evening of November 11, 1837, Nathaniel Hawthorne, accompanied by his sisters, Elizabeth (Ebe) and Louisa, stopped at the Peabody home, in Salem, Massachusetts. It was Hawthorne's first visit to the family, though he lived just a few blocks away. Painfully shy, he had spent the previous ten years in almost complete seclusion, composing short stories at a desk in his bedroom in the hope of establishing himself as a professional writer. Elizabeth Peabody, the eldest of the three Peabody sisters, who were then living with their parents on Charter Street, had read and admired the stories in Hawthorne's first book, "Twice-Told Tales," which had been published that spring. She was impatient to meet him.

Elizabeth, like Hawthorne, was thirty-three years old. A woman of prodigious energy and determination, she belonged to an impoverished branch of an old New England family (the Peabody Museums at Harvard and Yale, and the Peabody-Essex Museum, in Salem, were named for a distant relative), and had managed to befriend many of the leading thinkers of her time, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had tutored her in Greek when she was a teen-ager. In her twenties, she had begun corresponding with Wordsworth, whose poems, she declared, "define all the mysteries of the heart."

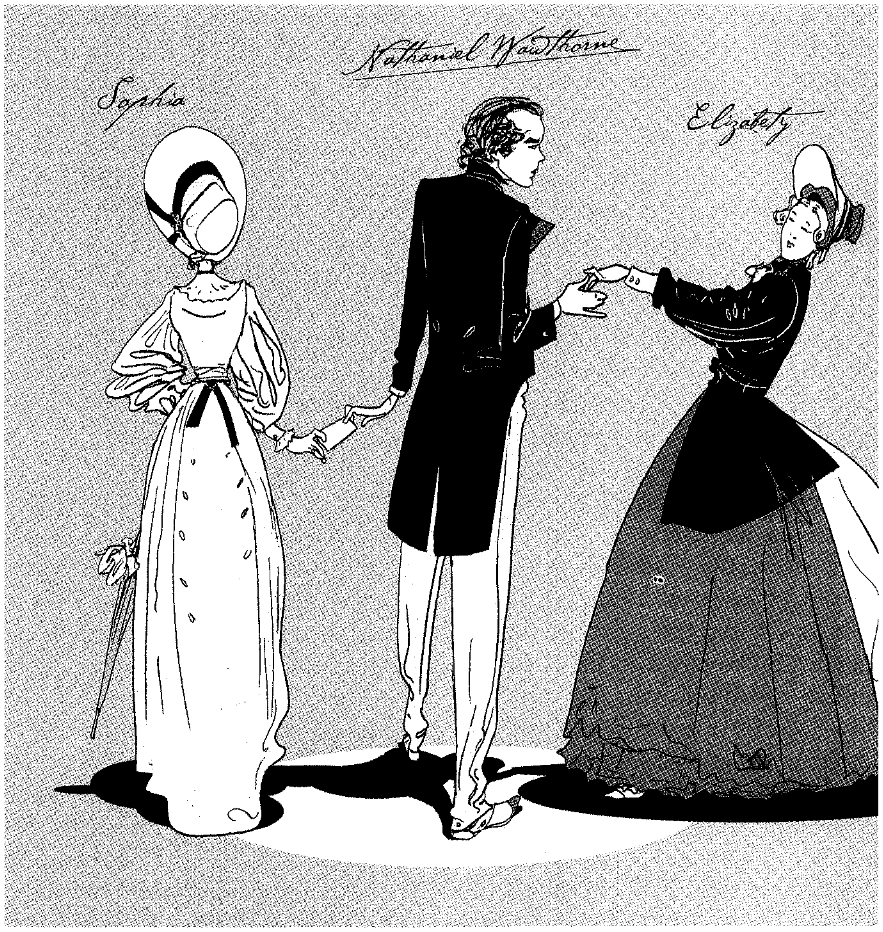
The abolitionist minister Theodore Parker called Elizabeth the transcendentalists' Boswell, but she was more accurately an instigator and an impresario. Emerson read her translations of French and German Romantic philosophy, including "Self-Education," by Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando, which she published in 1830, at twenty-six—seven years before Emerson proposed the idea in his essay "The American Scholar." In 1834, she and Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa May Alcott, founded the progressive Temple School, in Boston. A year later, she published "Record of a School," a series of dialogues between Alcott and his students on art, religion, and "the advantage of having an imagination"—the first book-length exposition of transcendentalist ideas.

Literary historians have portrayed Hawthorne's first visit to the Peabody home as a turning point, marking his entrance into public life and the beginning of his transformation from an obscure short-story writer into the world-famous author of "The Scarlet Letter." In 1842, Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody, Elizabeth's youngest sister. "There are only a few great love stories in American fiction, and there are fewer still in the lives of American writers," Malcolm Cowley wrote in a 1958 essay, "The Hawthornes in Paradise." Cowley declared Hawthorne's "courtship and conquest of Sophia Peabody" a story that should be retold "as long as there are lovers in New England." Invoking "The Scarlet Letter," he added that, unlike the novel, "the lived story was neither sinful nor tragic."

However, the marital idyll had a troubling prelude, which shows Hawthorne in a harsher light. On the night of his first appearance at the Peabodys', Elizabeth enthusiastically befriended Hawthorne, and he seemed to welcome her attention. Over the next few months, he visited her frequently—before entering the parlor, he would steal up to the door and peer through the crevice, to make sure that no other visitors were present—and they were often seen walking together in Salem.

In April, 1838, five months after they met, there were rumors in Salem that, as Hawthorne reported with amusement in a letter to friends, "I am engaged to two ladies in this city." In the weeks leading up to his wedding to Sophia, some Salem residents still didn't know which Peabody he intended to marry. Whichever sister became Hawthorne's wife, the lawyer Benjamin Merrill wrote to Salem's Whig congressman Leverett Saltonstall, "The world may be blessed with transcendental literary productions."

Scholars have traditionally dismissed the notion that Elizabeth and Hawthorne were romantically involved, citing an account that Elizabeth gave her nephew, Julian Hawthorne, in 1882, twelve years before her death, and that Julian incorporated in his 1884 biography, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife." Elizabeth told Julian that Sophia had been too ill to come downstairs during Hawthorne's first visit. But they met "soon after," she said, depicting their romance as "the coming together of two self-sufficing worlds," with "all the glow of the rush together of young hearts."



Hawthorne doubtless saw Elizabeth as someone who could help advance his career.

ISTVAN BANYAI

However, an unpublished and previously unexamined biography of Elizabeth Peabody, housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society, in Boston, tells a less happy story. The biography, written in 1904 by Mary Van Wyck Church, one of a group of young admirers of Elizabeth, quotes from her letters and journals and describes an interview that Church conducted with Elizabeth at Church's house on the Hudson River.

"It was quite towards the latter end of her life," Church wrote, "that Elizabeth one summer day, seated under the trees on the lawn . . . drifted back to this far away passage of her life. . . . Her voice trembled & the sentences came brokenly." Hawthorne had been "the love of her life," Church recounted, and he was "warmed & comforted in soul by the glow of her ardent comprehention of his genius." Even so, Church added, "With Hawthorne, it never was love, though he doubtless . . . so considered it," and Elizabeth "was too strong, too magnanimous & too clear in her understanding to be long held in the bondage of an unhappy passion."

Nevertheless, Church asserted, Hawthorne's treatment of Elizabeth had been reprehensible. "But for . . . his constant tendency to belittle her even sometimes to the extent of discourtesy in his notes, no need would exist to unveil the truth after all these years."

Elizabeth had been enchanted by Hawthorne from their first meeting. She described the evening in detail to Julian, beginning with Hawthorne's arrival at her home, where he appeared flanked by his sisters and wearing his customary black cape and cravat. (Conscious of his striking good looks, he made a point of dressing well, in order to conquer his reserve.)

She told Julian that she had welcomed the Hawthornes into the parlor, where they sat stiffly in a row. She tried to put them at ease by showing them drawings by the English artist John Flaxman. While the Hawthornes looked at Flaxman's illustrations of "The Iliad," she ran upstairs to Sophia, who was twenty-eight years old, a talented landscape painter whose migraines frequently kept her in bed. "Mr. Hawthorne and his sisters have come," she announced, "and you never saw anything so splendid—he is handsomer than Lord Byron!" Sophia refused to see him. "I think it would be rather ridiculous to get up," she said. "If he has come once he will come again."

Elizabeth returned to the parlor, where she was joined by her middle sister, Mary, who was thirty-one, a teacher and writer of children's stories. Sophia, who was alternately awed and irritated by Elizabeth's overbearing intelligence, may have feared that she would be outdone in literary conversation by her sisters. Her headaches had made her, as she put it in a letter to Elizabeth, "to all appearances a *bed case*—a poor, miserable, maimed—nerve twisted—trembling, wearied concern." She had hardly painted in more than a year; that winter, she rarely came downstairs at all.

Mary described Hawthorne's visit afterward in a letter to her brother George in New Orleans, reporting that he had "lived the life of a perfect recluse till very lately," and was "so diffident that he suffers inexpressibly in the presence of his fellow-mortals." Mary also noted Hawthorne's "temple of a head," his "eye full of sparkle glisten & intelligence," and his promise to come again.

Over the next several weeks, Hawthorne confided to Elizabeth that he had come by his "cursed habit of solitude" as a child. His father, a sea captain, had died of yellow fever in Suriname when Nathaniel was three. He had been raised in Salem and rural Maine by a mother who, Elizabeth observed, had adopted an "all but Hindoo self-devotion to the manes of her husband," seldom appearing in public. His sister Ebe, who was rumored to have been disappointed in love as a young woman, had retreated to her

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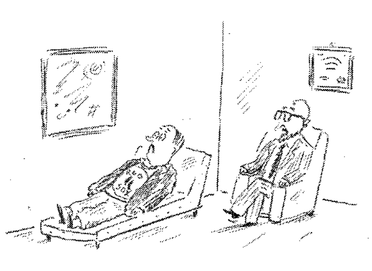

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room, where she spent most of her time reading. Hawthorne wished he could do the same. He wrote to his mother at the age of fifteen, on the eve of his departure for Bowdoin College, "Why was I not a girl that I might have been pinned all my life to my Mother's apron."

He told Elizabeth that he had been unable to bring himself to enter one of "the three professions"—law, medicine, and the ministry—customary for young men with college degrees, and that he had vowed to cultivate "the literary part" of his life. For ten years, he lived on a modest inheritance, income from his mother's family's stagecoach line, and wrote stories at his desk, burning the pages he didn't like, and slowly developing the brooding, revelatory style of "Twice-Told Tales." He saw his younger sister, Louisa, most days at tea, and his mother occasionally afterward, but the Hawthornes ate their meals alone in their rooms. Three months might pass before he encountered Ebe, he said. There seemed no disputing the emotional truth of his lament "We do not live at our house."

In March, 1838, Elizabeth published a front-page review of "Twice-Told Tales" in *The New-Yorker*, a literary weekly founded by Horace Greeley. (In 1841, Greeley closed it to start the daily *New York Tribune.*) Elizabeth predicted that Hawthorne would "take his place amongst his contemporaries, as the greatest artist of his line." She cited his isolation as a beneficial influence on his work, a notion that became part of his public persona: "We have heard that the author of these tales has lived the life of a recluse; that the inhabitants of his native town have never been able to catch a glimpse of his person; that he is not seen at any time in the walks of men." Hawthorne, she said, wrote with "the wisdom which comes from knowing some few hearts well."

He was also more calculating than she realized. Opportunistic if not bold, Hawthorne doubtless saw Elizabeth, in part, as someone who could help advance his career. The previous year, he had sent a copy of his book to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had been a classmate at Bowdoin and was then teaching at Harvard. In a subsequent letter, he gave Longfellow an account of his life similar to the one he later gave Elizabeth—down to the melodramatic description of his solitude. "For the last ten years, I have not lived, but only dreamed about living," he wrote, adding, "I seldom venture abroad till after dusk." A month later, a review by Longfellow appeared in the *North American Review*, pronouncing Hawthorne "a new star ris[ing] in the heavens." Since then, however, there had been only silence from reviewers and dwindling sales.

In truth, Longfellow had been put off by Hawthorne, who had squandered his college years drinking and playing cards. Writing to a friend in 1838, Longfellow described Hawthorne as "a strange owl; a very peculiar individual, with a dash of originality about him," although "very pleasant to behold." But Elizabeth found Hawthorne's tale of solitary apprenticeship irresistibly romantic. In February, 1838, she sent "Twice-Told Tales," along with Emerson's first book, "Nature," to Wordsworth. America's "popular story tellers are the ballad makers of the nation," she wrote in an accompanying letter, adding that Hawthorne's tales were the "best in this line," because "he dares to write for Beauty's sake." She also sent his book to her friend Horace Mann, a social reformer and politician who had recently been appointed secretary of the Massachusetts state board of education, hoping that he would hire Hawthorne to write stories for schoolchildren.

Elizabeth had fallen in love with Hawthorne, and he, unlike Mann, with whom she had carried on an intense platonic relationship in Boston earlier in the decade (and who in 1843 married her sister Mary), encouraged Elizabeth to believe that he shared her feelings. That winter, even as he was extricating himself from a desultory flirtation with Mary Silsbee, an attractive Salem heiress and experienced coquette, he told Elizabeth that he wished she had written to him years before, when she had first read his stories in magazines and gift annuals. It would have made "an epoch" in his life, he said, for at the time he had felt "like a man talking to himself in a dark place." Hawthorne urged her to visit his home, ostensibly to see his sisters. But his invitation—"I will come for you whenever you say I may"—seemed to convey a more personal motive. "I wish you would come for my sake," he added.

Elizabeth Peabody was small and slim, with fair hair and a square chin. She was also headstrong, and careless of her looks. Emerson was dismayed by her appearance. She was "not neat—and offended," he said. But he praised her for having "the ease & scope & authority of a learned professor or high literary celebrity in her talk." Hawthorne was accustomed to unusual women, but the qualities that enabled Elizabeth to help him professionally—her unflagging initiative, her impulsive generosity, her bossiness—may have also repelled him.

By contrast, Sophia was almost childlike. Pale, delicate, and acutely sensitive—her word was "hypersympathetic"—she was also determinedly optimistic, despite her illness, and prone to sudden enthusiasms. Her room was decorated with art work—English and Italian landscapes, busts of Apollo and Hercules—and her journals were filled with descriptions of wildflowers and sunsets. When Hawthorne learned of Sophia's migraines and her artistic sensibility, he declared her, without having met her, "a flower to be worn in no man's bosom, but let down from heaven to show the human soul's possibilities."

In January, 1838, George Peabody returned from New Orleans, where he had gone to look for work. He was scarcely able to walk. Just twenty-four years old, he had suffered for most of the previous decade from vague stomach complaints and spells of paralysis, which, the family soon learned, were early symptoms of spinal tuberculosis. George was installed in a room across the hall from Sophia, on a "hydrostatic" bed—a six-inch-deep trough filled with water and sealed with an India rubber sheet, designed to keep him from contracting bedsores.

When Sophia felt well enough, she sat in George's room, offering advice about how to combat pain. She recommended that he take his morphine in the morning, as she did, to avoid nightmares. And she described the benefits of the hammock she slept in, the "dear little couch" that reminded her of a sea voyage to Cuba, where she had spent nearly two years pursuing a rest cure.

But George's condition seemed to confound all that Sophia believed about invalidism. "It is the lot of woman to be ill," she wrote to her friend Mary Foote in early March. She could hardly bear to see George, a man "in the very glory of his youth, shut up in one room and fastened to one chair." By then, Sophia was able to contemplate the journey downstairs. She warned friends whom she had not seen for weeks to prepare for her "sword face and white hue" and to "see me shrink at the sound of my own voice."

It is not clear just when Sophia and Hawthorne finally met; letters and journals from the period suggest that the encounter probably took place sometime during the spring of 1838. That day, Elizabeth told Julian, she and Hawthorne were talking in the parlor when Sophia appeared. "He rose and looked at her—he did not realize how intently," Elizabeth recalled. She watched as each of Sophia's infrequent remarks, delivered "in her low sweet voice," was met with that "same intentness of interest." "What if he should fall in love with her?" Elizabeth wondered. "I was struck with it, and painfully."

She told Mary Church that she wrote to Hawthorne immediately, informing him that she was leaving home, and "that it was best to look upon the chapter of our pleasant companionship as closed. That I felt convinced it had been a mistake on both our parts to regard it other than mere friendship. Certainly I knew it was best for me so to consider it, and that I believed he would later on come to the same conclusion. I bade him farewell and then I went away."

Elizabeth announced to her family that she had decided to live with her brother Nat in the Boston suburb of Newton Corner, where he was starting a school for boys. Nat's barely concealed dislike of her must have made the plan particularly unattractive. In a recent letter, he had berated her for not marrying when she had had the chance. He was most likely referring to Lyman Buckminster, a young Harvard Divinity School graduate from a prominent New England family, who had proposed to her when she was eighteen. Had she married, Nat complained, "the fortunes of your own and our family would have been different, perhaps prosperous."

Before leaving Salem, Elizabeth lent Hawthorne the hand-stitched volumes of a journal that Sophia had kept in Cuba, where he could read about her sister's illness and, Elizabeth may have hoped, begin to understand the burden

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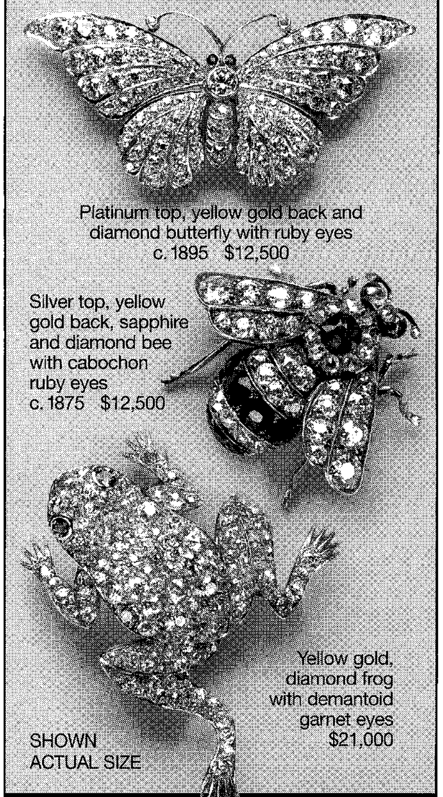

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her care would pose for the man who married her. Hawthorne was captivated by the journal, keeping it for more than a month, and copying numerous passages into his notebooks. When he returned it to Sophia, he told her that she was "the Queen of Journalizers."

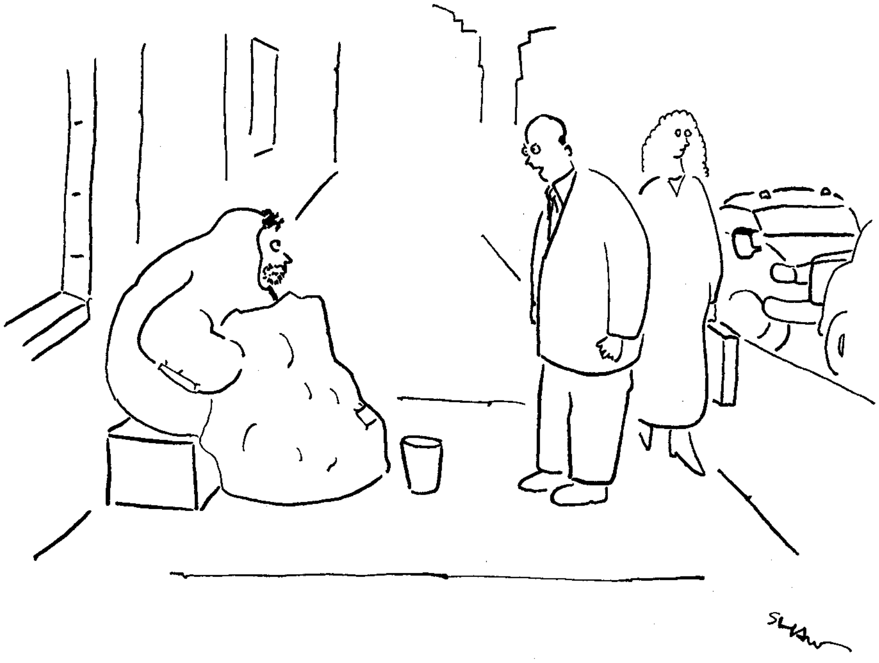
Sophia's recovery was not immediate, but, if she was expecting Hawthorne, she would be up and dressed; if he failed to appear, she took to her bed and refused to see him the next time he came. Hawthorne would visit George instead, knowing that Sophia would overhear them from her room. On his way past her door, Hawthorne might have been able to glimpse her lying in her hammock, where, she told Elizabeth in a letter, she "pulled all the combs out of my hair and sent it streaming like a comet over my shoulders."

She developed a sense for when Hawthorne was at the front door, feeling "just as sure it was Mr. Hawthorne as if I had seen him." She gave him a nosegay of sweet violets, which he kept in water for a week before taking one to Boston to be set under black crystal—"enshrined from every possible harm"—and mounted on a gold brooch that he intended to wear himself. Returning to Salem, he declared the brooch "too fine" for him and gave it to Sophia.

Elizabeth complained that Sophia was "cutting" her out of the friendship by seeing so much of Hawthorne while she was away. Sophia replied that "Mr. H's coming here is one sure way of keeping you in mind." She was certain, she wrote, that Hawthorne found her companionship "excessively tame" compared with Elizabeth's "society and conversation," adding, perhaps disingenuously, "I think you will shine more by contrast."

Hawthorne had promised to write to Elizabeth, but apparently she had received no response to several letters. In late April, Sophia wrote that Hawthorne had drafted a letter to Elizabeth and that "it was a great thing for him" to have completed it. She reported that Hawthorne was bringing a packet of letters for Elizabeth to Boston; he might even take the fifteen-minute train ride to Newton to find her. Impatient, Elizabeth went to Boston and waylaid Hawthorne in the lobby of his hotel, only to learn that the letters he had for her were all from Sophia.

By now, Elizabeth was tired of hearing about Hawthorne's "celestial expression" and about how "brilliant" he looked. After reading a book about Persia, Sophia wrote that she hoped to travel there someday, like the retired Harvard president John Thornton Kirkland and his wife, before catching herself: "Oh! I forget. I never intend to have a husband." In another letter, Sophia mentioned that Hawthorne planned to write a story based on an incident from her stay in Cuba. She had told him that, while vis-



"*You should at least learn an instrument.*"

iting friends in Havana, she had cleaned a sooty religious painting using her fingers dipped in aromatic oils, and uncovered a beautiful Mary Magdalene, which she took to be the work of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. Hawthorne set to work transposing the scene to Colonial New England.

The finished story was "Edward Randolph's Portrait," whose heroine, Alice Vane, is "a pale, ethereal creature," an artist of "no inferior genius," who disrupts the war deliberations of a Colonial council when she cleans a grimy portrait hanging in the council chambers, revealing a dark omen. The colony's outraged governor rebukes Alice for daring to bring her "painter's art" into his office and for presuming to "influence the councils of rulers and the affairs of nations, by such shallow contrivances."

In mid-June, Elizabeth informed Sophia that she had received a letter from Hawthorne, which does not survive. She told Sophia that it was "queer and written in some sort of excitement when he was fighting with some unhappiness." In it, she added, he alluded to a second letter, written "out of his heart," but which he had decided not to send.

Soon after this exchange, Hawthorne left Salem to travel. Sophia sent Elizabeth a terse account of his parting visit: "He said he was not going to tell any-one where he was to be the next three months . . . that he neither intended to write to any one *nor be written to*."

In July, Elizabeth began to hint that she wanted to come home. She complained to Sophia that despite all she had done for Nat—finding him a house with an ample schoolroom, recruiting pupils, teaching every day—he seemed "utterly indifferent" to her efforts. She decided to return to Salem by way of Concord, where she spent much of August with Waldo and Lidian Emerson, absorbed in the public debate over Emerson's "Divinity School Address."

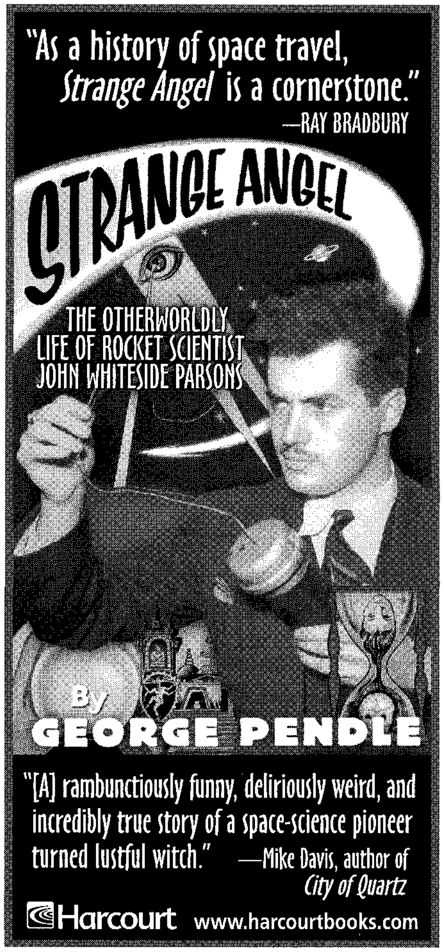
In the speech, which Emerson had delivered at Harvard on July 15th, he had urged graduating divinity students to "cast behind you all conformity," and to reject the pulpit, as he had done, in favor of lectures and essays preaching a "universal" spirituality. Andrews Norton, one of the divinity school's founding professors, had responded in a Boston newspaper, calling the address an "incoherent rhapsody" and an "insult to religion." Emerson was not invited back to campus for nearly thirty years.

Elizabeth had likely been in the audience at Harvard and was captivated by Emerson's idea that, as she put it in a letter to George, "*Power* is the eternal life we find ourselves to have." In a journal entry quoted by Mary Church, Elizabeth wrote that the notion gave her a way of understanding her attraction to the men she described as "the three greatest actual powers" with whom "I am in direct relation": Emerson, Mann, and Hawthorne. She told herself that it was "the divine" in them that "clutches my imagination and melts away my understanding." Hawthorne, she wrote, had "tenderness enough to make a hundred husbands." But, she added, "at this very moment Hawthorne may be passing out of the state of celibacy." She vowed not to write to him again.

By September, 1838, the Peabody sisters were in Salem, taking care of George, who was now often in acute pain. Elizabeth may have been hoping to win back Hawthorne, who had returned from his travels. She left her knitting at his house, telling his sister Louisa that she planned to spend "four or five evenings" there "in the course of the winter," and she resolved to find him a paying job. Hawthorne's finances were precarious: that summer, train service had connected Salem to Boston, and his mother's family's stagecoach line was near collapse. Elizabeth again encouraged Horace Mann to hire Hawthorne to write children's books, arranging for them to meet in the Peabody parlor. Afterward, she wrote to Mann that she hoped "the frigidity" of Hawthorne's "diffidence" did not "quite destroy the brilliancy of his beauty."

She had more success persuading friends to give Hawthorne a political appointment requiring, as she put it in a letter to his sister Ebe, "very little time & work—& having abundant leisure and liberty" for writing. By November, she had found him a job as customs inspector for the Port of Boston, with a salary of eleven hundred dollars a year, which he could supplement with income from the sale of his stories.

Hawthorne was less solicitous of her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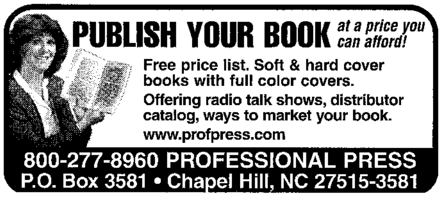
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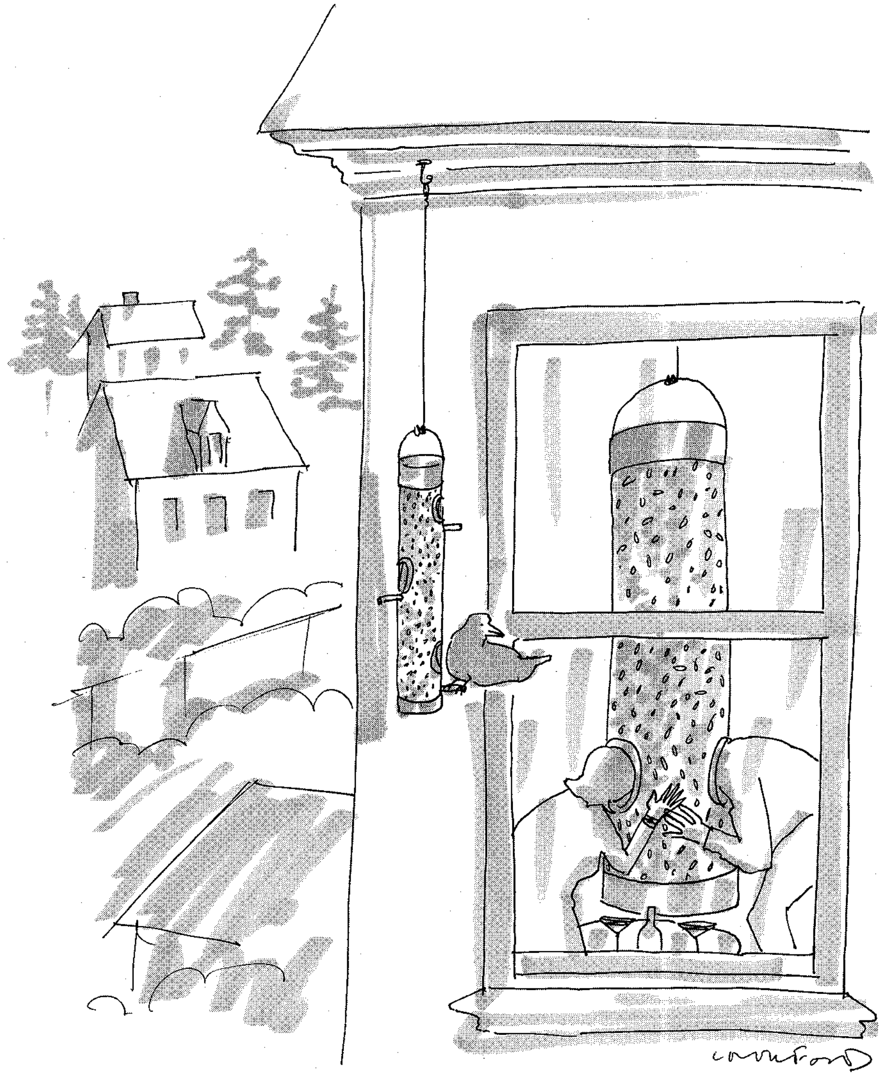


welfare. In May, 1839, when Elizabeth had not been paid for an article he had helped her to publish the previous year in *The Democratic Review*, he wrote to John O'Sullivan, the review's editor, telling him not to worry about the money. Elizabeth, he assured O'Sullivan, "is a good old soul and would give away her only petticoat, I do believe, to anybody that she thought needed it more than herself."

Sophia's efforts to assist Hawthorne were more warmly received. Without telling him, she began an illustration for "The Gentle Boy," her favorite story from "Twice-Told Tales." She chose the opening scene, in which a boy, Ilbrahim, is found weeping beneath the gallows tree in a Colonial New England village, where his father has been put to death for Quaker heresies. When Sophia finished her drawing, she showed it to Hawthorne, saying, "I want to know if this looks like your Ilbrahim." Hawthorne studied the sketch and replied, "He will never look otherwise to me!" Soon there were plans to publish the story and the drawing in a special edition, subsidized by Susan Burley, whose literary salons Hawthorne and the Peabody sisters had attended. "The Gentle Boy: A Thrice Told Tale" served Sophia's ambition to establish Hawthorne as an author worthy of illustration, an American Shakespeare.

With the prospect of a steady salary, Hawthorne was in a position to propose to Sophia, and by the end of December they were secretly engaged. Apparently unable to tell Elizabeth directly, Hawthorne contrived a way to let her know. On January 1, 1839, the Salem *Gazette* printed Hawthorne's "The Sister Years," a New Year's "address" to the city of Salem and, implicitly, to Elizabeth and Sophia, who read it sitting together on the train from Salem to Boston.

Sophia was on her way to see the engraver Joseph Andrews, to supervise corrections to her illustration of "The Gentle Boy." Sophia wrote to their father that she and Elizabeth had "passed the time" on the train reading "The Sister Years" aloud, finding it "full of wisdom" and "illuminated with wit."

The address, presented as a seasonal allegory, features the New Year as a young woman full of "smiling cheerfulness" arriving in Salem on the first morning train of January, 1839. Wearing a dress "rather too airy" for winter, and carrying a basket of roses, she has come to replace her "disconsolate" older sister, the Old Year, who waits for her on the steps of City Hall, burdened with an enormous folio volume, her "Book of Chronicles." Spilling from her arms are remnants of the difficult months of 1838: "several bundles of love-letters, eloquently breathing an eternity of burning passion, which grew cold and perished, almost before the ink was dry," as well as "an assortment of many thousand broken promises" and "a large parcel of disappointed hopes."

The New Year listens uncomprehendingly to the Old Year's litany of woes, offering as consolation the "fine lot of hopes here in my basket." Finally, she turns away and starts up the street, "a wonderfully pleasant looking figure," handing roses to everyone she meets.

Elizabeth had at last found her way into one of Hawthorne's stories. So, again, had Sophia, this time as a woman full of "so much promise and such an indescribable hopefulness in her aspect, that hardly anybody could meet her without anticipating some very desirable thing—the consummation of some long sought good."

There is no record of Elizabeth's reaction to "The Sister Years." Remarkably, she continued her work on Hawthorne's behalf. In 1840, she opened a foreign-language bookshop in Boston that served as a gathering place for transcendentalists, and a year later she became the publisher of *The Dial*, the movement's main journal. At her own expense, she printed Hawthorne's first stories for children, three volumes of historical tales beginning with "Grandfather's Chair," in 1840. But when the series didn't sell he quarrelled with her, and, in 1841, in a rare expression of bitterness, Elizabeth confided to Theodore Parker, a new friend, that, as he put it in a commiserating letter to her, she had been "cruelly wronged." It's not clear whether she named Hawthorne as her offender.

Biographers often cite Sophia as the inspiration for several of Hawthorne's characters. Yet his relationship with Elizabeth may have been equally significant. All of his novels feature powerful women, and more often two. Both "The Blithedale Romance" and "The Marble Faun" involve pairs of women—one sunny and vulnerable, one troubled and manipulative—who view themselves as sisters and vie for the affection of the novel's hero. The defiantly sensual Hester Prynne, Hawthorne's most memorable heroine, combines the attractions of both Elizabeth and Sophia.

In 1853, Sophia and Nathaniel moved with their three children to England, where Hawthorne assumed the position of United States consul in Liverpool, a government sinecure provided by President Franklin Pierce, another Bowdoin classmate. Four years later, Elizabeth sent Sophia an antislavery essay she had written. Hawthorne intercepted it and returned it to her without showing Sophia, chiding her for "bothering" her sister with propaganda. "No doubt it seems the truest of truths to you," he wrote, but "you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision."

By the time of the Civil War, Hawthorne and his family had moved to Concord. There he was afflicted with a mysterious ailment that made it difficult for him to work. He died in 1864, at the age of fifty-nine, leaving behind several unfinished manuscripts.

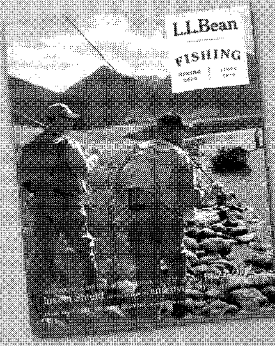
Elizabeth lived to be ninety and became a formidable advocate of progressive ideas, promoting abolition, woman suffrage, and Indian rights; establishing the first American kindergarten; and attaining literary immortality as Miss Birdseye, the indefatigable spinster activist in Henry James's "The Bostonians." (Elizabeth had been a friend and correspondent of James's father.)

When pressed by strangers and acquaintances, Elizabeth steadfastly denied that Hawthorne had jilted her. In an 1886 letter to Amelia Boelte, a niece of one of Elizabeth's kindergarten colleagues, she was emphatic: "I must hasten to tell you that it is all a mistake.—It is true that for the first three years after Hawthorne became known to and a *visitor* in our family, it was *rumoured*, that there was *probably* an engagement between him and *me* for we were manifestly very intimate *friends* and Sophia was considered so much of an invalid as not to be marriageable by any of us, including *herself* and Hawthorne."

Except to a few close friends, Elizabeth never spoke of how Hawthorne had used and mistreated her, apparently not even to Sophia, to whom she remained devoted. Mary Church, realizing the significance of Elizabeth's confession, had debated whether to include it in her biography: "Only after careful consideration did I decide to give it as an incident of her life that tends to clear the atmosphere & put in right relation much that has seemed inexplicable and indeed must so remain until the whole truth were made known—Naturally it could never be during the lives of any who bore a part."

Elizabeth's relatives evidently considered the biography too inflammatory to publish. Benjamin Pickman Mann, Elizabeth's nephew, had lent her letters and journals to Church, but after he read her manuscript he refused to coöperate further. "I threw my storehouse open to you with almost complete abandon, not contemplating your independent use of its contents," he wrote to her in an indignant letter. (Mann may have destroyed material that he found offensive; many of the journals Church quotes are missing from the collection of Peabody and Mann family papers that he donated to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1915.)

Elizabeth had been in Concord shortly before Hawthorne died, but had not seen him; Sophia had insisted that he was too weak to receive visitors. Her letter to Elizabeth after the funeral was contrite. "He said he wished I had told him you were here that last Sunday," Sophia wrote. "But I know he did not wish to say any particular thing. It was a feeling of old friendship and solid regard—a sympathy with your great-heartedness—which was always in any one who had it—so powerful with him." Sophia seemed to be trying to make amends. "I do not believe any one understood him better than you except myself," she wrote. "No one appreciated you—as he constantly said—so well as he. 'I am her best friend,' he always said." ◆



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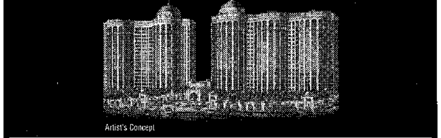

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LETTER FROM CALIFORNIA

SECRET AGENT MAN

Is there another way to succeed in Hollywood?

BY TAD FRIEND

On a cool evening last October, rain was soaking the photographers who lined a red carpet in front of the Buffalo Club, in Santa Monica. They were waiting for the film star Ewan McGregor, the guest of honor at a party celebrating "Long Way Round," a miniseries on Bravo that documents how McGregor and a friend rode their motorcycles around the world, more or less. Under a tent in the club's garden, one could hear a convivial rumble from the usual mixture of models, ad executives, and prowling young men with ambitions to direct.

In a corner of the tent, also waiting for McGregor and looking even more miserable than the photographers—he was clutching himself as if his appendix had burst—was Dave Wirtschafter, the president of the William Morris Agency. Agents from William Morris and its leading competitor, Creative Artists Agency, C.A.A., customarily sweep through parties in identical Armani suits and Prada shoes, swinging their arms wide for vaguely urban handclasps—*Dude! Have you been handled, drinks-wise?*—as they sift for news, guard their clients from rival agents, and aggressively seek to poach from those rivals. *Hey, Tom Hanks! Huge fan. You, sir, are a national treasure.* Agents are the moths of Hollywood, drawn to the town's brightest lights.

Wirtschafter, however, hates going out, hates being called bro or dude or buddy or baby, hates "Santa Clausing" clients with gifts, hates schmoozing and toadying—hates all the aspects of being an agent that have traditionally defined the profession. A fit, watchful man of forty-seven with a thatch of Dry Look-style hair, Wirtschafter was wearing a brown leather jacket and jeans and a jade Maori talisman on a thong around his neck. He looked as if he might be there to replace the keg.

He was there because his agency had put together "Long Way Round" after McGregor's own agency, C.A.A., turned it down—and because William Morris hoped to poach the star. "C.A.A. basically told Ewan it was a stupid idea," John Ferriter, the William Morris agent who orchestrated the miniseries and a companion book, says. "When I heard that, I was dumbfounded—you always have to pursue what the client wants to do." If Mel Gibson wants to make a Biblical epic in Aramaic, his agent's only sensible response is "Judea is lovely this time of year!"

There are some two hundred talent agencies in Los Angeles. The five largest, which represent about seventy per cent of Hollywood's working entertainers, have nearly ten thousand clients among them, a number that includes musicians, novelists, athletes, corporations, and Regis Philbin. Yet the Big Five's movie-division business depends, in significant part, on a few dozen stars. Because stars can green-light a film, having a cluster of them at one agency draws the best scripts and directors there, too. C.A.A., which represents, among others, Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman, and Jennifer Aniston, has by far the best actors' list; other agencies compare it, bitterly, to the New York Yankees. "They're all in blue suits and they're all named Josh and they're all coming at you," Cara Stein, a William Morris board member and the co-head of the New York office, says.

William Morris began to rejuvenate itself when Dave Wirtschafter and Jim Wiatt, who is now the agency's C.E.O., were hired away from International Creative Management, in 1999. It makes some two hundred and twenty million dollars a year in commissions (plus about five million from investments) and is, financially, at least, within striking distance of C.A.A. But William Morris is by far Hollywood's oldest agency—it started in New York in 1898 as a vaudeville booking service—and it has a lingering reputation as a canasta room of yesteryear. It represents only about a half-dozen lead actors, including John Travolta, Reese Witherspoon, Kevin Spacey, Morgan Freeman, Tommy Lee Jones, and Kirsten Dunst, and one superstar: Russell Crowe.

For years, Wirtschafter represented mainly directors and writers; among his forty clients are Ridley Scott, Gus Van Sant, Larry and Andy Wachowski, Paul and Chris Weitz, Bill Condon, Brad Bird, Ron Shelton, and Spike Lee. Within the past fifteen months, however, he has branched out to sign Halle Berry and Chris Tucker and the pop stars Alicia Keys, Ciara, and Lil Jon. And, ever since he was promoted to the agency's presidency, there has been mounting pressure on him to meet, to greet, and to poach.

Turning to his wife, Dominique, Wirtschafter glanced at his watch—it was just after seven—and said, "There is a ridiculous element to this. If I saw Ewan and said, 'Congratulations, we met for five minutes in England,' he'd be, like, 'Who the fuck are you?' "

Dominique, an attractive screenwriter of black, white, and Cherokee heritage, who seemed actually willing to enjoy the party, said, "You are not only memorable—you are *hot.*"

"Oh, please."

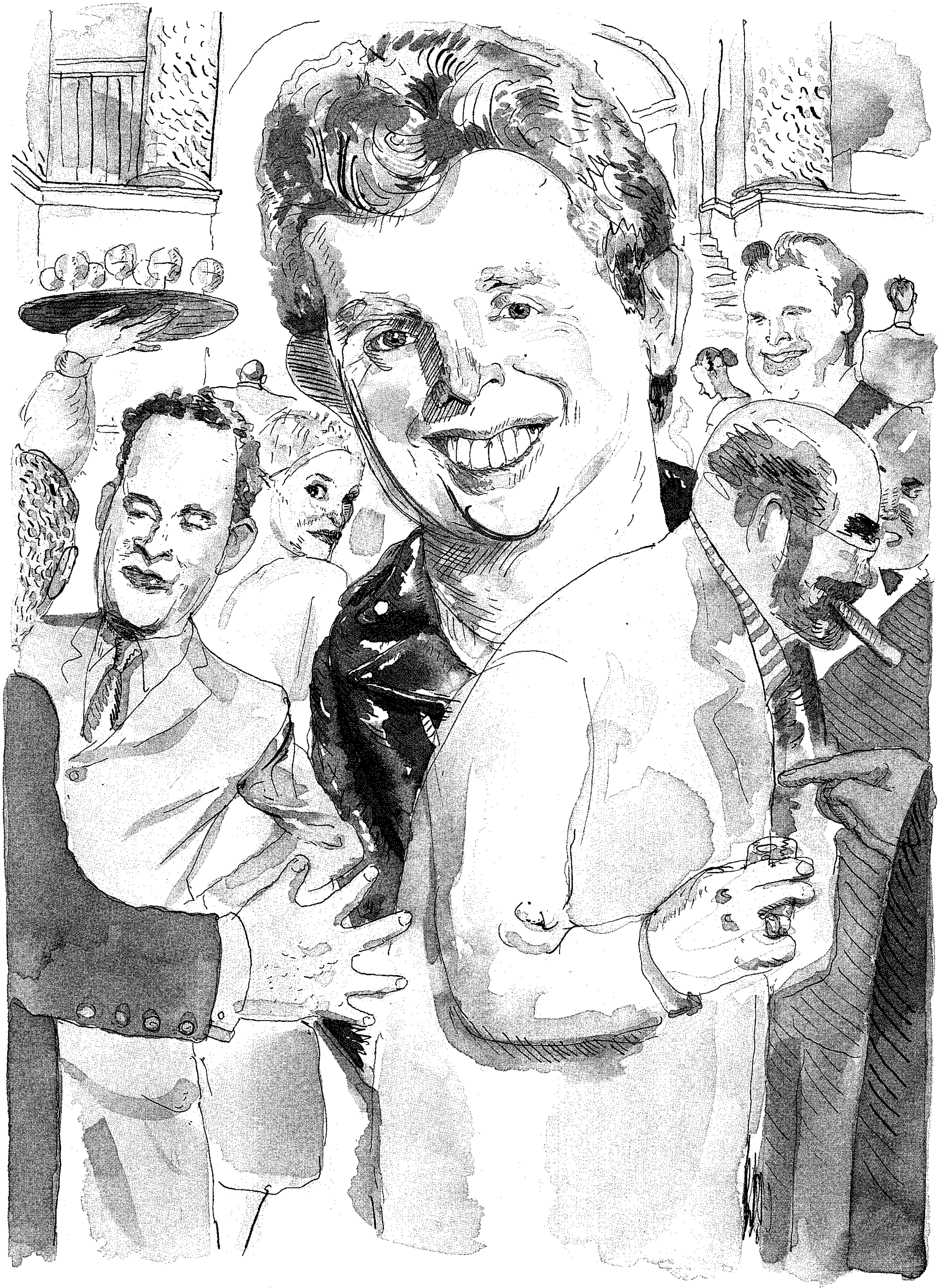
"Every woman here wants you."

Wirtschafter's smile was unexpectedly boyish: "Yes, all the model-actresses are lusting after the married agent in the corner."

"It's been a challenge for Dave to deal with actors, to learn to be more verbose," Halle Berry told me later. "I feel honored when he goes out with me, or even puts on a new shirt, because he's so not about the bullshit of this town. He came to my party recently"—a book party that Berry gave for her acting coach—"and, yeah, he did sit with Dominique in the corner the whole time. But a year ago he wouldn't even have come."

Many of the best agents radiate energy and charm and wisdom, and seem to understand and approve of you, the essential, inner you, in a way that even your college

BARRY BLITT



"Doing this job is about removing emotion, about creating calm," Dave Wirtschafter, the president of William Morris, says.

sweetheart never did. At the same time, to paraphrase Walter Matthau's remark about poker, agents often exemplify the worst aspects of capitalism that have made our country so great. When George Shapiro, who is now a well-known talent manager, was at William Morris, he had his assistant answer the phone: "George Shapiro's office—kill for the love of killing!" And one C.A.A. agent woos talent with the credo "I want to be your asshole," or, when he's in a more introspective frame of mind, "I want to be your bitch."

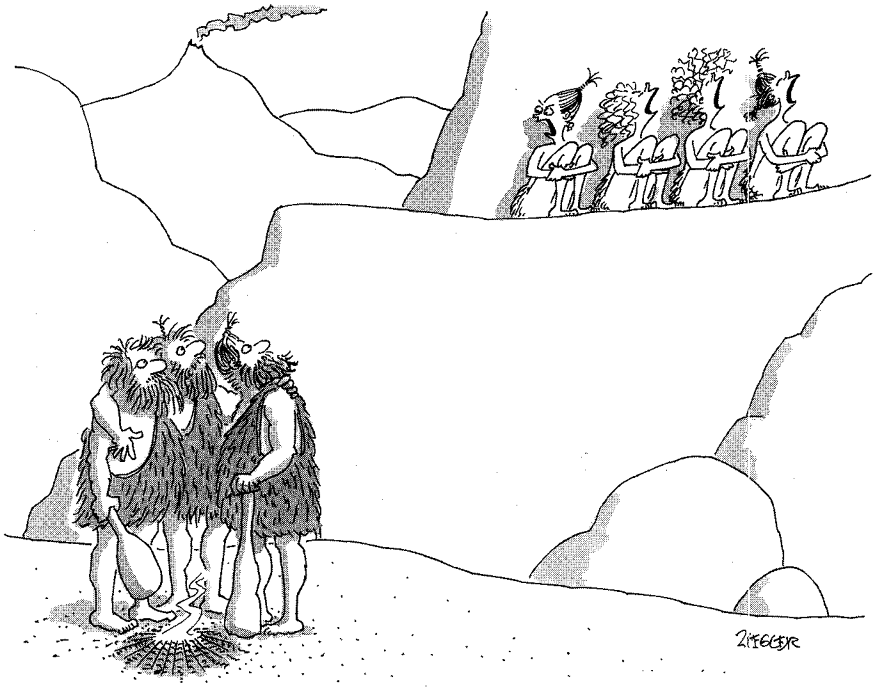
Wirtschafter tries to be an exception. His client Randall Wallace recalls an episode from 1992, when he was a relatively unknown writer and M-G-M had offered to buy his next two scripts for four hundred thousand dollars, and seemed willing to let him direct one. "Can we get more?" he asked Wirtschafter. "When somebody believes in you like that, you don't try to squeeze them," Wirtschafter replied sternly. The scripts became the films "Braveheart" and "The Man in the Iron Mask," "so everyone came out right, and it proved Dave's point," Wallace says.

Yet, as Wirtschafter has taken on some of the top agent's time-honored duties—signing stars, and even visiting an occasional set—he has increasingly found it necessary to employ the top agent's time-honored weapons. That night, he was essentially lying in wait for someone else's client—even as other agencies were stalking *his* list. One rival agent took note recently when he saw the writer and director Neil LaBute, a Wirtschafter client, all alone at a script reading. "Dave is waiting to do the directing deal for Neil on two scripts Neil didn't write, instead of getting involved in the creative gestalt," the agent said, rehearsing his agency's potential poach. "I'm seeing Neil not getting representation for his truth as an artist." (For his part, LaBute says, "Dave is the best kind of Little League father—he's watching supportively from the stands, not wrestling the other fathers to the ground and beating them senseless.")

The agent continued, "Dave is smart and honorable and hardworking, but is he funny, does he get it? He's trying to be less of a phone jockey, less of a paper mover, but with his antisocial sensibility and his life away from this country"—the Wirtschafters have a home in New Zealand, and every time they take a vacation there other agencies spread the word that he has gone for good—"it's hard. It's all an attempt to deal with as few people as he can, because he doesn't get the vibe off people that he's cool."

At the Buffalo Club, it was seven-forty, and there was still no sign of Ewan McGregor. Theresa Peters, another William Morris agent, called McGregor's publicist on her cell phone, and reported, "They haven't even left the hotel."

Wirtschafter brightened: "Great, let's go!" Fifteen seconds later, they were out the door. After McGregor arrived, at eight-thirty, he asked John Ferriter who else from William Morris was there. Ferriter, who says, "People always appreciate the support of your presence," gave McGregor a list of six agents, without feeling it necessary to mention that Wirtschafter and Peters were supporting the star, at that moment, by their absence.



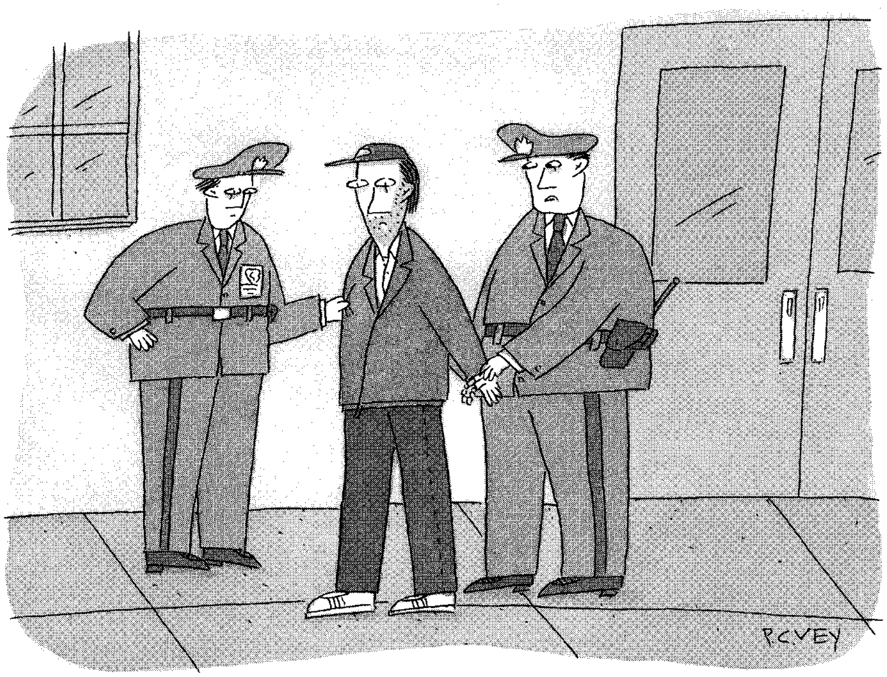
"Please! No harmonizing during ululations!"

Wirtschafter often likes to be free of his clients in order to focus on them; that night he read scripts until ten-thirty. Wirtschafter doesn't "paper" his directors with scripts. He sent his client F. Gary Gray just one in a six-month period, and Gray ended up directing the movie—"Be Cool," which stars John Travolta and came out two weeks ago (to tepid reviews). Ridley Scott says, "Dave is the best I've ever met at reading everything worth reading and selecting the few things I should read."

Shortly after Wirtschafter fell asleep, the phone rang: it was his client Bryan Singer, the director of "The Usual Suspects" and the forthcoming "Superman Returns." Earlier that day, Singer had agreed to let Warner Bros. announce that he'd finally cast his Man of Steel, an actor named Brandon Routh. Then, at an evening screening, he'd let the news slip. "I suddenly went crazy and wondered if I'd totally blown it," Singer says. "I needed to talk to someone who could see the chess game several moves in advance, and that's Dave."

Wirtschafter reassured the director that "no one has been disadvantaged," and Singer hung up, greatly relieved. "I'm neurotic, and Dave is Zen," he says.

After Singer's call, Wirtschafter couldn't get back to sleep. He usually drops off for only about three hours a night, anyway, rising at around 1 A.M. to read scripts and scribble diagrams in a blue notebook, plotting the decision tree of the following day's phone calls: if *a*, then *b*, *c*, *d;* if not *a*, then *x*, *y*, *z*. The two-hundred-and-sixty-four-page contract he negotiated on behalf of the Wachowski brothers for the two sequels to "The Matrix" had five separate components, covering video games, online games, a comic book, and a television show; the Wachowskis ended up making nearly as much from the games as they did from the two films, approaching eighty million dollars, all told. "The process of turning this idea into three movies that made Warner Bros. three billion dollars was painfully tortuous," Joel Silver, the films' producer, says. "But I came out of it loving Dave, as opposed to thinking, That motherfucker, fuck him, which is usually the case." Wirtschafter is constantly on the lookout for ways both to bring his clients together and to extend their reach into new fields, and was elated when, recently, his client F. Gary Gray supervised a Cadillac commercial starring the agency client John Travolta for the agency client General Motors. "We put G.M. into the equation, G.M. put advertising dollars into 'Be Cool,' and the 'Be Cool' talent created the ad for Super Bowl Sunday," he says. "And that is our future. The chain between the dough—corporate America—and the talent, represented by us, will have one less link in it: the ad agencies. We get that link's money. Same work, new thinking, new money." Wirtschafter's gift for unusual ideas, and his ability to make others see that his algorithmic diagrams are a kind of treasure map, earns him about five million dollars a year.



"Next time you hold up a crowded store, don't wear a recognizable fragrance."

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The next day, Wirtschafter staggered through his allotment of two hundred phone calls and then went to bed at ten—only to be awakened by a call from Toby Emmerich, the president of production at New Line Cinema. "Were you asleep?" Emmerich asked.

"No," Wirtschafter said groggily.

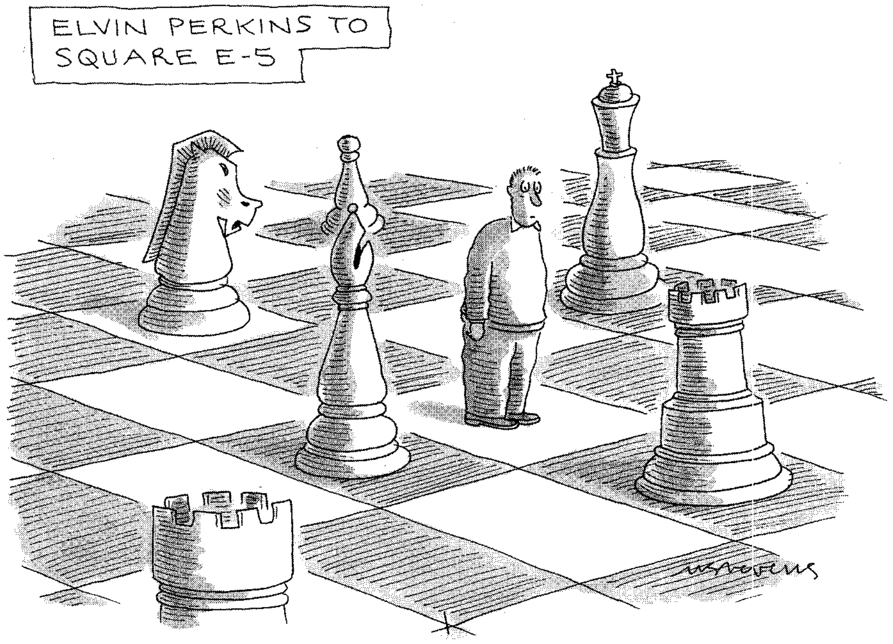
For weeks, Wirtschafter's client Chris Tucker had been weighing whether to accept twenty million dollars and twenty per cent of the box-office receipts to star in New Line's not yet written "Rush Hour 3." That night, Tucker had driven up to Emmerich's house in Coldwater Canyon. Emmerich was fresh from a yoga session and was wearing a T-shirt and shorts; Tucker, who had arrived in his Bentley, was wearing a suit. Over a couple of bottles of Heineken, they agreed that the film would go into production this year—and Emmerich immediately picked up the phone. "I had to have Chris say 'Yes, we've made the deal' to Dave," Emmerich says. "Otherwise, the next day it might all fall apart." The actor and the executive, on speakerphone, were unrepentant about having roused the agent from bed: "You've got to get out more, man!"

"I'm not a groovy fellow," Wirtschafter acknowledged. "It's kind of sad."

After Wirtschafter promised to get the contract rolling right away, he once more found himself unable to sleep. He got up again, read four scripts, and roughed out a mechanism—which Emmerich later agreed to—whereby Tucker would get paid an additional twenty million dollars for an unspecified second film for New Line. He thereby established a new going rate for the star in films that aren't "Rush Hour" sequels. "I think better at night," Wirtschafter says. "There's no fear, because I'm alone, and the only anxiety I have is when I can't figure out a problem, or if I come up with an idea and can't communicate it—BlackBerrying someone at 2 A.M. is unlikely to get a response. Those seven hours to 9 A.M. are a long time."

For many years, talent agents were widely derided as lowlifes who took ten per cent of their clients' income and gave little in return. In the nineteen-thirties, legend had it that agents wouldn't order tomato juice in public, lest someone joke that they were drinking their clients' blood. In 1954, the screenwriter Ben Hecht wrote of agents, "When my fortunes were high, they swarmed around me like Oriental courtiers. When my fortunes were low, they clapped on their turbans and bolted." Nowadays, however, agents are often lawyers and business-school graduates who talk confidently about vertically integrated paradigm shifts in commoditized delivery systems. The change of job description began to occur in the nineteen-eighties, when Michael Ovitz ran C.A.A. and became the most powerful and feared man in Hollywood. When I had a drink with Ovitz recently, he ordered a tomato juice. He explained that by making his agents wear black suits and always fly at night, he could have them devote the daylight hours to business, which began with a staff meeting at eight or eight-thirty—markedly earlier than William Morris, from which he and the other C.A.A. founders had defected, in 1975. They created agents who looked better and worked harder and saw themselves in a new light.

"We modelled ourselves on the M-G-M studio of the nineteen-thirties and forties, because they had all the stars and they took care of everything," Ovitz told me. Ovitz had studied the business philosophies of Lew Wasserman, the longtime head of M.C.A., which was the top agency of the nineteen-forties and fifties and later acquired Universal Studios; Wasserman, too, had modelled his company on M-G-M. M.C.A., which became known as the Octopus, devel-


ELVIN PERKINS TO SQUARE E-5

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oped its skill at jamming clients into projects to such a point that when, in the nineteen-fifties, it sold television shows it earned, through its various subsidiaries, an astounding seventy-five per cent of the production costs.

But Wasserman's innovations had been largely forgotten by the time Ovitz rediscovered them. "Agents traditionally felt you should have clients who don't conflict with each other," Ovitz said. "Our thesis was that you want *every* conflict, because that means you've got all the talent, all the material, and all the leverage to put movies and shows together, set prices, and get studios to finance them. We got every script and ran five Xerox machines full time. The clients with the most passion and push would get into the project, and we'd package it with other clients to create maximum leverage. When every element of a picture like 'The Natural' or 'Rain Man' was in place, we'd say to a studio, 'Would you like this?,' and if they hiccupped we were off somewhere else."

Ovitz involved C.A.A. in creating ads for Coca-Cola. He advised Sony on its purchase of Columbia TriStar Pictures, and, in a final, Oedipal twist, advised Matsushita on its purchase of M.C.A.—Lew Wasserman's company. Agents, after Ovitz, became known as the best gatherers and packagers in the information economy. "Agents are the catalysts of the industry," Jeffrey Berg, the chairman and C.E.O. of I.C.M., says. "Whenever you see a movie that really impresses you, like 'Moulin Rouge' or 'The Pianist,' it usually runs counter to the way the industry operates, and invariably there's a motion-picture agent behind it."

Today's best agents excel at devising blueprints, elegant models that convey how a movie or a production company—or any piece of entertainment, really—should look and feel. "If it were me and I were writing this article," Mike Ovitz told me, borrowing my pen to sketch the rungs of a ladder on a bar napkin, "I'd talk about the history of the agencies first, then, part two, the contemporary five agencies and how they differ, and I'd get into Dave, part three, and then I'd continue, 'Da Vinci Code' style, interlacing all these different issues, so you have three, four, five stories going at once."

"I'm probably going to start with Dave," I said.

"This advice is worth exactly what you paid for it," he said cheerfully.

"You never win if you go against an agent," the producer Brian Grazer says. "When Ron Howard and I were making 'Night Shift' "—a 1982 comedy that starred Michael Keaton and Henry Winkler—"John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd were our first choices. Mike Ovitz wanted us to pay a big fee to another potential producer, and it just felt so unfair. So Ovitz said, 'You can't talk to them anymore, they're out.' We talked to John and Dan anyway, and they wanted to do it. Ovitz decided to crush us, and he did. He told them not to do 'Night Shift,' and he later got John Travolta not to do 'Splash' when we had him interested." (Ovitz says that he doesn't recall telling Travolta not to do it.) "After 'Splash' came out and was a success, I saw Ovitz at a party at Chasen's, and he came over and put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'We did it, right, Bri?' I thought for a millisecond, Should I rebuff this and have some dignity, or just fold in?" He laughs. "I folded in."

But Ovitz's power, like that of all agents, derived from his clients. And when he left C.A.A., in 1995, to work with his old friend Michael Eisner at Disney, he was suddenly defenseless. He was let go from Disney after fourteen months, and then his management and production company, Artists Management Group, collapsed—to widespread glee—when his former protégés at C.A.A. banned their clients from doing business with him. "I always viewed myself as the quarterback of a smoothly oiled football team, the playmaker," Ovitz said. "But all of the aggressive playmaking came back to haunt me."

One September morning, Dave Wirtschafter sat in his office in the William Morris building in Beverly Hills, barefoot, wearing jeans and a sweatshirt, and talking on the phone with Samantha Kirby, a music agent in the firm's New York office. She wanted advice on how to sign Shakira, the Colombian pop star. "Just saying we're great in music doesn't work anymore," Wirtschafter explained. "My speech to people is it's a pyramidal scheme, with music at the top." Though he speaks in rapid, smiling bursts when he's excited, Wirtschafter slows to Berlitz-tape speed when outlining a tricky idea, and he now began to articulate ev-e-ry syl-la-ble. "We put her together with Suzanne Gluck"—the co-head of William Morris's literary department—"in the book space if she wants to write poetry or a memoir, have somebody from movies meet with her if she wishes to act, and present her with an economic plan out of our Miami office, which could be, for instance, based on Jennifer Lopez and a model I came up with for her on 'The Wedding Planner.' She didn't end up using it—her people didn't really get it—but the idea was based on the original-language value of publicity. In other words, if she does publicity in Spanish in Mexico, and the projected gross of the movie is one million dollars, and it's two million after she publicizes it, she gets fifty per cent of the difference. Which," he concluded in a soft voice, "adds up to a lot of money, all around the world."

Wirtschafter crossed Kirby off his phone sheet with a green highlighter and reclined in his leather chair, staring absently at a fishtank across the room. Wirtschafter had fish as a child, and he finds their presence soothing until he sees one floating belly up; then he grows morose. Above the tank was an incredibly ugly "Death to Smoochy" movie poster, with a head shot of his close friend Jeff Robinov, the president of production at Warner Bros., pasted atop the body of the purple rhinoceros. Wirtschafter calls Robinov Mr. Smoochy, because it is an unlikely nickname for a reserved man; for much the same reason, Jim Wiatt calls Wirtschafter Mr. Personable.

Wirtschafter's office, which is littered with scripts and random tchotchkes, is an anomaly in the agency world (as is William Morris's notoriously dumpy building, last renovated in 1980). The standard top agent's office features a glass or steel slab for a desk, a Warhol lithograph, and no clutter. The idea is that creativity is embraced, and that the focus is all on you, the client. Lew Wasserman, of M.C.A., used to walk the halls at night and sweep any papers left on his agents' desks into the wastebasket.

Returning to business, suddenly, Wirtschafter called out to his assistants, "Young ladies, can we dial . . . ," and he rattled off seven names. Carolyn Sivitz, his second assistant, immediately got on the phone. She sits in his outer office, greeting visitors and keeping track of the phone sheet, while Ava Greenfield, the agent's first assistant, sits eight feet from him, in one corner, manning two phones, typing out an endless string of e-mails, muttering to Wirtschafter as she listens to his callers with her headset muted—"That's total bullshit!"; "He is so lying!"—and hydrating furiously from a gigantic bottle of Fiji water.

Wirtschafter made four calls, each about thirty seconds long, trying to find out if Michael Mann was going to pass on directing a Warner Bros. script called "Diamonds," in which case the agent would position his client Carl Franklin for the job. After placing a dozen more calls over the next few days, he was able to tell Franklin, "Polly Cohen at Warners told me she's feeling strung along by Michael, and I told her that Jamie Foxx said to Spike Lee that Michael Mann had told Jamie to be available in May to do 'Miami Vice'—which means he's not doing 'Diamonds' and we're looking good." Each piece of business may require four or five dozen such calls, the small hammer taps that set the nail for a decisive blow.

Throughout this process, Greenfield and Sivitz sent e-mail updates to the three other agents on Franklin's team. By listening in on every call, assistants become a spare lobe of the agent's brain. When Greenfield was working for another agent, her boss automatically cc'd her on an e-mail that said, "I'm so over Ava today; I'm going to fire her." This training by forced intimacy is intended to make up for—even as it's a part of—an exhausting and often demeaning life. Tom Strickler, a founder of the Endeavor Agency, boasted to David Rensin, the author of "The Mailroom," that he handcuffed one assistant to a chair and later flushed his "ugly" watch down the toilet, all, presumably, to help him better understand what it takes.

Wirtschafter's assistants have an easy, almost motherly relationship with him. They translate his gestures when callers are waiting: a raised finger means "He'll be right with you"; a dialling motion means "Can he return?"; an eye roll means "Can he return?" (but he'd rather not). Every client wants to feel treasured, and the assistants adjust their excuses according to how important it is, at a given moment, to soften the blow. In ascending order of "You really matter to Dave"-ness, their explanations are: "He's on a conference call" (conference calls sound more momentous); "He's in a staff meeting"; "I just lost him in the car, I'm afraid"; and "He's in a screening." Sometimes the explanations are even true.

Many agents are fuelled by their clients' hysteria, and will call the studio every fifteen minutes to convey that the absence of a DVD player in a star's trailer, say, is a human-relations Chernobyl. Wirtschafter takes the opposite approach. "Doing this job is about removing emotion, about creating calm," he told me. "Calm creates order, and order allows you to solve problems." He likes to talk about taking an "environment," a "universe," or, particularly, a "space," such as "the musically capable girl-band space inhabited by the Donnas," and ridding it of impurities, making it "clean" and "pristine," as if he were a starship captain sterilizing an alien quadrant of the galaxy.

To his detractors, Wirtschafter's bloodlessness is alarming. "Dave Wirtschafter is a transitional figure in a transactional business," one producer who has had dealings with him says. "He's cold, within himself, and vindictive." When a big client fires him—as Michael Douglas, for example, did—Wirtschafter's first response is dismay. "You say to the trades, 'I wish him well,' but your first thought is, That motherfucker," he says. "I always fear that there's some agent that's better than me—that somebody else will do better with the same material." But as time passes he takes comfort in a recitation of subsequent facts, a recitation that—were it not delivered in a studiously objective tone—would sound like ill will. Of his former client Guy Ritchie, whom he considered a friend until the director suddenly fired him, Wirtschafter says, "Guy is not in the groovy, glamorous place he was then, and I think that's just unequivocally interesting, as karma." Of Wesley Snipes, Wirtschafter says, "He believed he was a fifteen-million-dollar movie star. The market doesn't reflect that."

Wirtschafter's belief that the workings of fate are on his side can make him, on first acquaintance, seem provokingly indifferent. Midway through one agency meeting with a prospective client, the director Wes Craven, Wirtschafter stood up to leave. One of Craven's people asked where he was going. Wirtschafter, who had already delivered his spiel, replied that he had an appointment to get a haircut. "Everyone was very crabby about it," he says, "but I had to go get my hair cut." It's only after Wirtschafter decides that someone in his orbit not only means no harm but is bright enough to bother with that he reveals a sarcastic sense of humor, and begins encouraging his new friend to "perk up," just as he is beginning to do.

Early one September day, a younger agent named Michael Cooper walked into Wirtschafter's office and received his standard greeting: "Are you a man or a mouse today?"

"A mouse," Cooper said, with a woebegone look. Cooper, like many of Wirtschafter's protégés, is more of a prototypical agent ("I *love* this movie for Ray Romano—I implore you to let this idea ferment!"), not least because of his slight build. The longtime chairman of William Morris, Abe (Kewpie) Lastfogel, was five feet three, and the current chairman, Norman Brokaw, who began work at the agency in 1943 and is shorter still, says, "We used to say that if you were taller than the doorknob here you wouldn't get the job." Wirtschafter, who at five feet eight is something of a William Morris giant, says, "We're the little birdlike reptilian fellows running around through the legs of the brontosaurus."

"O.K., so here's the move," Cooper said. "You call Rob Bowman and basically reassure him that if he comes over you'll be available if he needs." Bowman is a C.A.A. client who directed "Elektra," starring Jennifer Garner, and Cooper, who hoped to poach the director, wanted Wirtschafter to perform a standard bait and switch. Agencies often sign talent by having a top agent promise personal attention, as clients tend to subscribe to the so-called "bigger/better deal theory" of representation. Once the client signs, the top agent disappears.

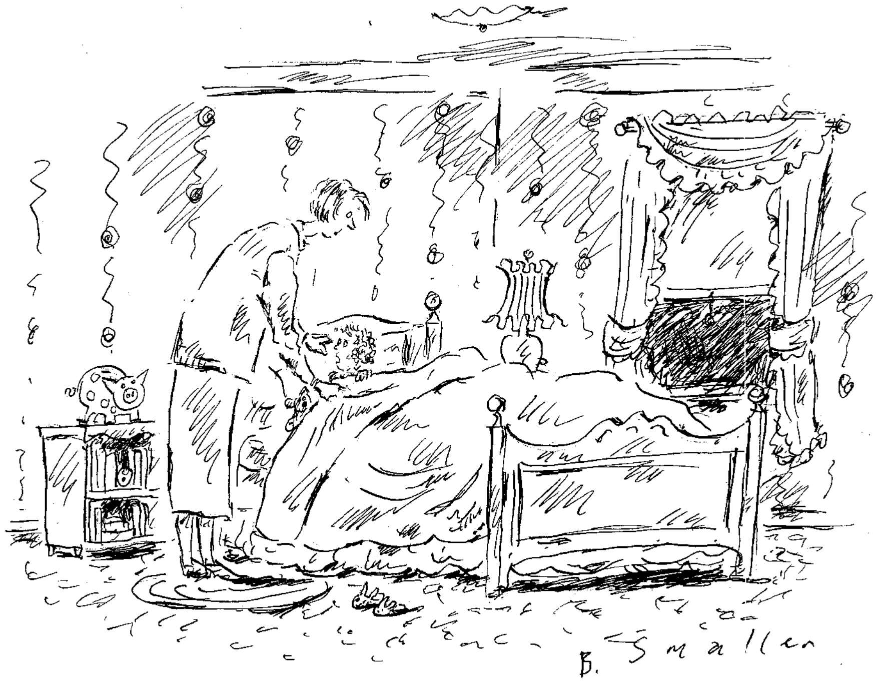
"It's all on me—this is a poor pitch," Wirtschafter told Cooper. "This is indeed mouse, not man."

"He only listens to you."

"Then how are you going to represent him? I will call, but only to pitch you." As Cooper departed, Wirtschafter called out, "Perk up, my mouse!"

Next, he met with Tariq Trotter, an agency client who is the lead singer of the Roots, and who now wants to act. "What are the zones you feel most comfortable in?" Wirtschafter inquired, and when Trotter replied, "My zone is more drama than comedy, but I can do both, because I'm a Libra," Wirtschafter gave him a single, styptic blink.

Wirtschafter then got on the phone with Halle Berry's lawyer to discuss her contractual demands for a psychological thriller called "Perfect Stranger." Berry was paid twelve and a half million dollars against ten per cent of the gross for her previous film, "Catwoman," but Revolution Studios wanted her to take less for the modestly budgeted "Perfect Stranger." "Many agents would say, 'Not a fucking chance, she gets all her money, fuck you,' " Wirtschafter told me. "But why not make it work for everyone?" He added, "Deals are about the world of the middle: how can you get it to be fifty-three per cent your way?"



"You'd tell me if I was genetically modified?"

He now told Berry's lawyer, "She'll give up a little money to get a good director or co-star"—thereby essentially buying insurance for her career, which needs burnishing after "Catwoman." (Berry's price has stayed buoyant because studio executives believe, for now, that she's a good actress who was in a very bad movie; a second straight bomb could lower her "quote" significantly.) "But if she is forced to go down," Wirtschafter continued, "she will be treated as an investor in the film for the difference, and for every dollar she invests she would get a dollar-fifty out of the gross until she recoups a hundred and fifty per cent of her investment. I don't know why anybody would think that's crazy—it seems totally logical to me."

From one perspective, his idea *was* totally logical: Berry would take less than her fee to help the movie get made, and should therefore get interest on her "loan." From another, it was extraordinarily audacious: stars who take their payments as a percentage of the box-office usually get, at most, a twenty-per-cent rate of interest; what's more, Berry, far from being an investor in the film, had put no money into it and would be paid ten to twelve million dollars in advance for ten weeks' work, with more money to come. A studio executive might well counter, "Absolutely, Halle should be treated as an equity investor—and they get net profits, not gross." (Net profits, in the Newspeak of studio accounting, which features terms such as "adjusted gross at initial actual breakeven," basically do not exist.) But, a week later, the studio agreed to Berry's terms.

An agent named Michael Eisner (no relation to Disney's C.E.O.) dropped by Wirtschafter's office and explained that there were impediments to Bryan Singer's wish to direct "The Mayor of Castro Street" for Warner Independent, a division of Warner Bros. Warner Independent caps director's fees at a million dollars and doesn't grant final cut; Singer's usual fee is close to ten million dollars, and he gets final cut on smaller films. Eisner couldn't see the fifty-three-per-cent compromise. "If Bryan's doing the movie for love," Wirtschafter said, "he can't have *less* artistic freedom." Wirtschafter tells his clients that there are three reasons to take a job: for money; out of love for the project; or to work with someone you admire. If it's for money, he adds, then don't torture yourself about quality; if it's for love or for a relationship, then don't torture yourself about money. "So we have to shift the film out of the division and into big Warners," Wirtschafter said. Eisner shook his head admiringly. Later, he said, "It's a great idea, but I'd be stunned if Dave can get that done, because it basically obviates the division."

The beauty of breaking a working model is that your clients benefit. The danger of breaking a model—the twenty-million-dollar mark for stars; the twenty-five-per-cent-of-the-gross slice of video and DVD revenues for profit participants—is that mayhem ensues. Other directors working for Warner Independent would be furious at their agents for not getting them Bryan Singer's deal, and their agents, in turn, would be furious at Warner for breaking the model for Wirtschafter but not for them. So when, a month later, Warner agreed to make the deal with Singer on "The Mayor of Castro Street," basically following Wirtschafter's plan—Singer would get final cut and a significant percentage of the gross—it employed the fig leaf that the director already had a deal with big Warner, so it was merely modifying that contract. "This town runs on higher percentages disguised as bonuses, side letters, and off-the-record agreements," Bert Fields, the well-known entertainment lawyer, says. "Each time you break a precedent, imaginative people are going to discover ways to say they didn't."

Every weekday at 12:55 P.M., the Beverly Hills office of the William Morris Agency vanishes for five minutes, before reconstituting itself, in platoons, at Mr. Chow, Spago, Piccolo Paradiso, and the Dining Room. For ninety minutes, the agency absorbs nutrition and information and then it reassembles at home to discuss.

Shortly after two, one day in mid-October, one of Dave Wirtschafter's colleagues walked into his office to ask him to call Jeff Robinov to find out which director Warner Bros. had turned to now that Ridley Scott had dropped out of "I Am Legend," a post-apocalyptic thriller starring Will Smith. The agent, Cliff Roberts, "covers" the studio for the agency; his job is to know everything that's happening there.

"Your Honor, wrong robe."

But Wirtschafter was at lunch with Elvis Costello. Another agent, Kimberly Bialek, who was in the office, picked up Wirtschafter's phone and called a contact at Warner Bros. to help Roberts out. She made her pitch and got nowhere. "O.K., just tell me this—did he have a movie with the studio? This year? Not yet out? O.K., O.K. Just tell me, does his name begin with an 'A'? An 'O'? How about 'M'?"

Roberts crouched beside her: "Tell her if she doesn't tell you you'll find out anyway and tell everyone she told you." Bialek repeated this, laughing. After some further back and forth, she asked, "Is it Francis Lawrence?" The source said, "I have to go now." Bialek hung up and punched the air: "Yes!" Lawrence's first picture, a Warner Bros. feature called "Constantine," starring Keanu Reeves, was to come out in February. As the agents walked out, Bialek said, "That's weird—why would they give him such a big movie?"

"He's moving up," Roberts said.

"A good agency is like the C.I.A.," Michael Shamberg, the producer of such films as "Erin Brockovich" and "Garden State," says. "They know which projects are falling apart, who's in rehab, who's fucking who. Intelligence flow is their business." An agency's job is to create leaks and then monetize its glimmering monopoly on that information; a studio's job is to plug the holes.

Failing to anticipate a studio's moves can undo an agent. Late one afternoon in March, 2003, Tobey Maguire, who was in Mexico, learned that Sony had dropped him from "Spider-Man 2" and offered the lead role to Jake Gyllenhaal, because Maguire had been insisting that his back was so herniated that doing the film's stunts could paralyze him.

Maguire's agent, his manager, and his lawyer all told him to fly back and reconcile with Sony, but the star wanted further counsel. So he called his girlfriend's father, Ron Meyer, the president of Universal Studios and Mike Ovitz's former second-in-command at C.A.A. Maguire said he believed that Sony would honor his $17.5-million contract: "I'll get paid." "You'll get sued," Meyer replied. After making a few conciliatory calls on the actor's behalf, Meyer spoke to Maguire again and said, "If you're going to be paralyzed, don't do it. If you're just going to be in pain, then get off your ass and do it."

Maguire flew back, apologized, took a physical, and went to work. Then he had his manager fire his agent, Leslie Siebert, of the Gersh Agency. Siebert, who suspected, correctly, that Meyer had been telling Maguire that she had been gravely remiss in not knowing what Sony was about to do, called Meyer to ask for his help. "I've been a great agent for Tobey for eight years," she said.

"I suggested that Tobey talk with you about it face to face," Meyer replied. "Good luck."

Maguire met with Siebert and, while puffing on a cigar, explained that if he had been at C.A.A. Sony would never have fired him, because the studio depends so heavily on the agency. Then Maguire signed with Richard Lovett, the president of C.A.A. and the sort of powerful agent who, like Ron Meyer, can tell an actor when to put a sock in it.

Dave Wirtschafter's upbringing taught him that hard work makes anything possible. He was born in San Pedro, a port city within greater Los Angeles, the only child of Sam, a gastroenterologist, and Mollie, an elementary-school teacher. He grew up admiring how his mother put his father through medical school and how his father devised a treatment for traveller's diarrhea and donated it to the World Health Organization. Driving home after work, he often calls his mother, who is fluent in Spanish, and tells her in Spanish about his day. Wirtschafter's friend Gary O'Hara says that he was something of a loner as a child: "I would go over to Dave's house and all three of them would be sitting in a room reading really intellectual books in silence."

Many of Wirtschafter's classmates became longshoremen, and the agent still views himself as equal parts beachcomber and working stiff. His wife reminds him, "You went to law school at U.S.C., honey—you got in maybe two fights in your entire life." Wirtschafter had thought of becoming a parasitologist, like his father, but turned to law after his first brush with Hollywood. While he was an undergraduate at the University of California at San Diego, in 1979, a short documentary film he'd made led to a job writing a fifty-page treatment for a miniseries, an Italian-American "Roots." The production company invited him to Beverly Hills; when he arrived, three lawyers in suits stared at a long-haired surfer dude wearing a T-shirt and a bathing suit. "They took one look at me and said, 'Thanks, but no thanks,' " Wirtschafter says. "I thought, I do not ever again want to be in a situation where I'm at a loss to understand the language, where I don't get paid, and where people can say 'See you' and I can't do anything about it."

While he was in law school, Wirtschafter began working in the mailroom at C.A.A. During his first few weeks there, he read the script of "Hoosiers" and saw (correctly, as events proved) that it had a great role for Gene Hackman, so he passed the script to a friend who was an assistant to Hackman's agent. Before long, Wirtschafter was promoted to working in business affairs, the division that handles contracts. He left for I.C.M. in 1986, and there he studied the styles of Jim Wiatt, then I.C.M.'s gregarious president—who later worked in tandem with Wirtschafter, charming clients as the younger agent strategized on their behalf—and Jeffrey Berg, the agency's erudite chairman. "I'm neither as personable as Jim nor as bright as Jeff," Wirtschafter says, "but I decided that in a one-on-one context I'm pretty good, and that I could make up for what I lack by doing more work than anyone else." When Wiatt jumped to William Morris, in 1999, Wirtschafter followed out of loyalty. "The thought of working without Dave at William Morris was horrific," Wiatt told me. "He's the glove to my hand, or I'm the glove to his."

Fear is a goad for Wirtschafter, but loyalty and admiration are even stronger ones. In early December, he came to New York on business and went one night to see Alicia Keys perform at a benefit concert. The next morning, he was as giddy as a bobby-soxer. (Keys says, "Dave is the *only* agent I ever met who actually got me, who saw me not as just a voice or a face or a body. He is so dedicated to me that he even made it to my first taping of 'Sesame Street.' ") In the course of a call to Michael Lynton, the chairman and C.E.O. of Sony Pictures Entertainment, Wirtschafter suddenly asked, "Did you see Alicia Keys last week on '60 Minutes'? Alicia . . . Alicia is my—even though I'm not supposed to say this—my favorite, and I'm going to send you the tape, because you cannot see her being so natural and charming with Charlie Rose and not think, Giant movie star. She is *it*—she is the second coming!" After Lynton agreed to arrange a meeting about a potential film starring Keys, wryness overtook Wirtschafter at having sounded so agentlike: "So that's my Willy Loman speech for today."

On days when he can't summon the passion, Wirtschafter starts to talk about retiring, and about teaching when he retires. On Wednesday nights last fall, he taught a class to twenty-eight U.S.C. sophomores: "The Movie Business: From Story Concept to Exhibition." Every week, he brought in agents and clients to explain, in intimate detail, how the business works.

One Wednesday, Wirtschafter wound up the two-hour-and-forty-five-minute seminar by discussing Hollywood friendships. "I had a writer client who was screwing up; he had a substance-abuse problem and he kept failing when he'd get in the room to pitch," he said. "He was a friend, I'd signed for a personal loan to get him his house, I'd saved the relationship between him and his wife." (Wirtschafter has often lent clients money; he paid his friend Gary O'Hara's medical bills when O'Hara had leukemia.) "One day, another agency phoned me to say that the writer was coming to see them the next day. I called to give him one more chance: 'Is there anything you want to tell me about?' 'No, no, everything's great.' 'Really? Because this other agency told me you're meeting them tomorrow. And here's my farewell gift to you: I'm going to let you go, undisrupted. Because if I called those guys back and said I was irate, there would be no meeting tomorrow at 4 P.M. They would let you go in a nanosecond, because you're not a big enough fish. Good luck.' "

Wirtschafter gazed around the room. "The other agency valued the peace in that case, but if it had been the Wachowski brothers, God forbid, they would never have called me. That's the thing about being an agent: you work around the clock, and not only do you never get any thanks—you get knifed when you least expect it."

A student slumped face down on the conference table and muttered, "I'm going to kill myself." Wirtschafter considered him and corrected course, slightly. "But, hey," he added, "having office space is always good."

Experienced agents have a few rules of thumb. They include:

1. *Philip Roth (noted author) trumps Joe Roth (noted studio head).* As Hollywood is a visual town that reveres what it reads, the way to undermine a rival agent is to

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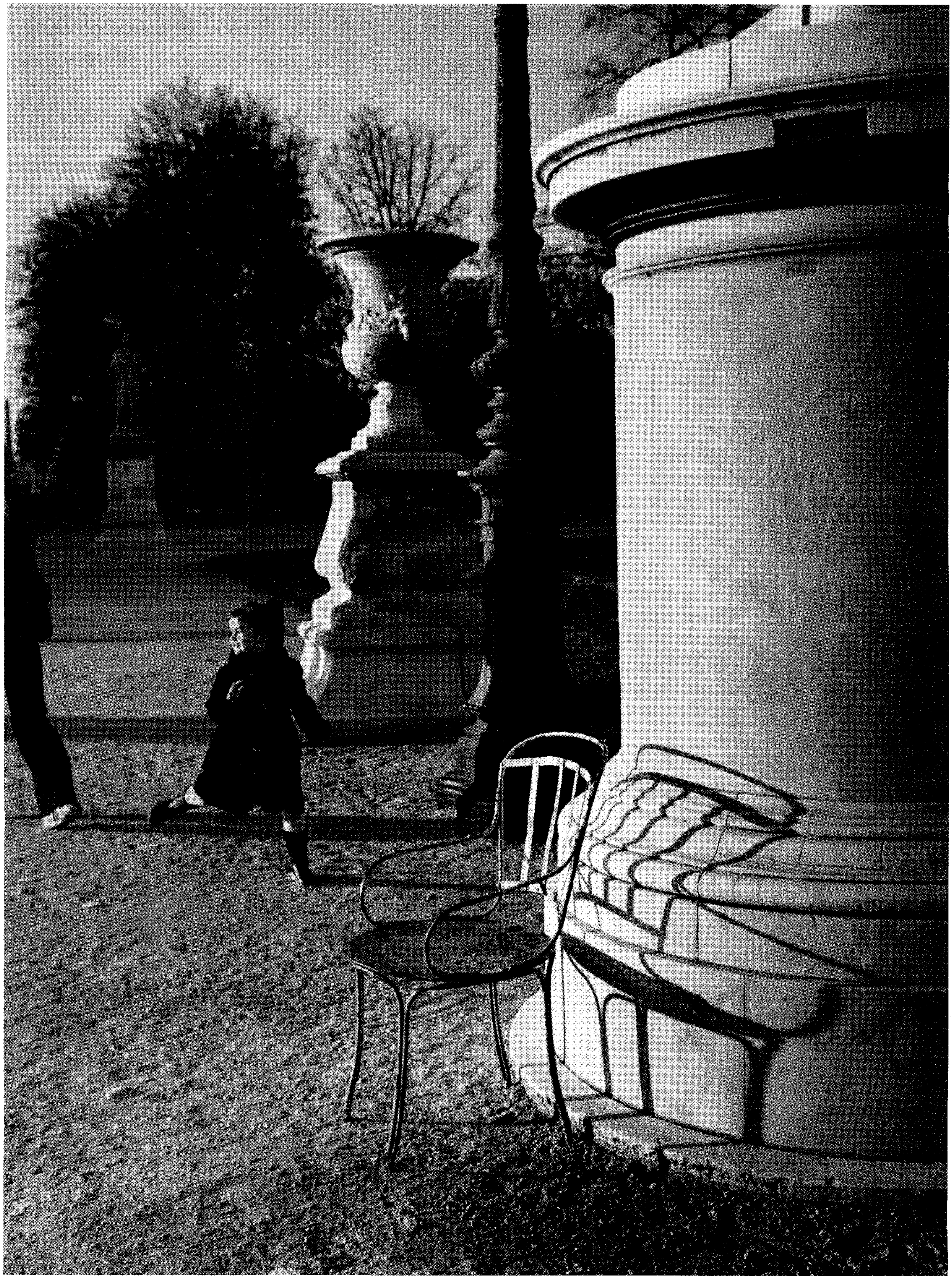
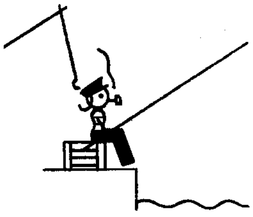


WINTER GARDEN *A retrospective of the work of the photographer André Kertész (1894–1985), renowned for his pictures of Paris street life, is on view at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., through May 15th. Above: the Tuileries Gardens in 1980.*

send his client a pre-publication galley of a classy book—it connotes New York, taste, and depth.

2. *At bonus time, Drew Carey trumps Jim Carrey.* The real money is in television, because agencies can "package" the shows—assembling the creative elements in a package for a network—and take three per cent of the show's license fee, rather than a mere ten per cent of one client's fee. Forty per cent of William Morris's revenues come from television, and only twenty-five per cent from films; last year, the firm's leading individual moneymaker was the television chef Emeril Lagasse. C.A.A.'s top moneymaker for years was Aaron Spelling, the producer of "The Love Boat."



3. *But, if you want to sign Drew Carey, have Jim Carrey give him a call.* Agencies deploy their film agents (and clients) to sign television stars; the promise is that the new agency will make the TV star a "double threat." But an agency doesn't want a Lucille Ball to be a minor film actress; it would rather have her keep churning huge fees in television. So the agency promises films, then, once you've signed, says, "We've got a great offer from the 'Joey' show."

4. *If you sign Gesine Bullock, Sandy comes, too.* Stars always have someone—a childhood friend, a mother, a sibling (such as Sandra Bullock's sister, Gesine), or even, in Justin Timberlake's case, a high-school English teacher—whose advice they seek while they're packed in mud at the spa. The star believes that his or her Gesine, at least, won't have a secret agenda. Agencies try to give the Gesines of the world a secret agenda. One leading agent says, "You sign the appendage. The wink is 'We're going to make your career happen, not just Sandy's.' "

5. *There is, very occasionally, such a thing as a free lunch.* To build an agency, you shave commissions. Early on at C.A.A., Mike Ovitz signed Dustin Hoffman by promising to represent him free. Endeavor, which had made its mark in television, moved aggressively into film when it signed Mark Wahlberg—which it did, apparently, by buying him a luxury car and agreeing not to take a commission on his first two films (an arrangement later extended to four films). Naturally, the parties always swear that they didn't break the model.

Most of these rules are about poaching, and are premised on the insight that potential is always infinite. "There's no other business where it's so completely expected that you poach," one highly successful agent says. "When I'm out killing buffalo, and my women are home skinning the buffalo, I don't want you stealing my hides or fucking my women. But you will." The agent listed a number of well-known clients who got poached. "They all fired me. The humiliation, the fear of the humiliation, the fear, the paranoia, the sadness, the loss, the crying in your car when you get fired on the car phone, the idea that the lunch circuit in this sickeningly tiny community is talking about you like a stock that's down—you get so fucking sick of it all."

Jeremy Zimmer, a board member at United Talent Agency, says that C.A.A. and Mike Ovitz "made trying to steal clients an accepted big part of your day, and that has had an adverse effect on movies. There's less time available to look for great material, and it's also harder for me to break from conventional wisdom, which is 'Do this big action film and get full price' and 'The studio is the enemy,' because you're worried that otherwise some other agent will say, 'That's all Jeremy got you?' "

In 1999, when Mike Ovitz was starting Artists Management Group, the master poacher tried to poach Dave Wirtschafter from I.C.M. (shortly before Wirtschafter went to William Morris). Over drinks at Ovitz's house in Brentwood, Ovitz said, "Dave, I love this act, the way you present yourself as the Maynard G. Krebs of the avant-garde, the smart, high-integrity, I-take-care-of-you-by-not-going-out presentation. But I'd take the act one-eighty, I'd fool people. You've got a lot of young guys looking to you—don't send them in this direction, because you can't have an agency full of guys who dress down and stay home. To run an agency, you've got to be out six nights a week."

Wirtschafter says, "I laughed at the 'act' part of his pitch, and I disagreed with the 'There's only one way to do it' part. I told him, 'If I'm successful enough doing it the way I do for you to want to talk to me, then I've already broken down your model.' "

Ovitz, looking for another point of entry, asked the younger agent what he liked to do, and, as he recalls the conversation, Wirtschafter mentioned that he'd just been fishing in Aspen. "I have a house there," Ovitz said instantly. "You can have it."

Wirtschafter says that Ovitz has it almost exactly right—but that he's never been to Aspen, and that he actually told Ovitz he'd just been fishing in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. "Mike Ovitz is a great agent," Wirtschafter says, "so it could well be that he would have had a house wherever I said I'd been fishing."

One October afternoon, Jill Smoller, who runs William Morris's sports and commercials divisions, arrived at her friend Wirtschafter's office and collapsed on the couch, just off a plane from China and ready, if not eager, to talk about extending the Serena Williams brand. She was wearing a rumpled "China Games" T-shirt and black sweatpants. "Great look," Wirtschafter said. "I'm stunned that there's not a line of husbands-to-be outside in the rain."

"Nice," Smoller said.

Carolyn Sivitz called in: "Jill, your car is blocking Walt Zifkin"—the firm's C.E.O. emeritus, who has one of the firm's sacrosanct back-door parking spots. "Oh, shit," Smoller said, running out. "You're fired," Wirtschafter called after her. "Goodbye!"

At a staff meeting earlier, Wirtschafter had announced that their colleague Hylda Queally, who represents Kate Winslet and Cate Blanchett, was going to C.A.A. This sort of bad news is traditionally circulated in a terse e-mail, but Wirtschafter wanted to try another tack. "No one should be angry or sad," he said. "No one should have self-esteem issues. No one should go after her or her clients. But let's talk about it, let's share our feelings."

The question of how to become cohesive and nimble has perplexed William Morris, which now has two hundred and ten agents in six offices worldwide, including outposts in London and Shanghai. "In the minds of our competitors," Wirtschafter said after the meeting, "we're still a lot of old Jews dropping dead in our offices."

On December 17th, the agency announced Wirtschafter's promotion to president, which had actually taken place nine months earlier but hadn't been disclosed because of an internal power struggle about the company's direction: should the agency stick to its traditional approach, in which music stars are represented by music agents and movie stars by movie agents, or try something new, as Wirtschafter wanted to do? The struggle was finally resolved in favor of fresh ideas by a five-to-three vote of the agency's secretive board-within-a-board, its compensation committee. The agency also announced that the three committee members who'd lost the fight were resigning.

Two weeks before that news was made public, Wirtschafter met with the company's forty-three New York agents in a conference room high above Fifty-third Street. He wore jeans and a black T-shirt and looked a bit self-conscious as he began to sell his colleagues on the agency's new philosophy: "If you were a client, you'd want everybody at the agency thinking about you, so you'd have this matrix of brain power surrounding you as you entered the building—television, music, books, and movies all working together—"

"And theatre!" Susan Weaving, from the six-agent theatre department, interrupted. "You've twice neglected to mention theatre."

"Oh, jeez, wow," Wirtschafter said, crossing his arms. "A disruption of the flow . . . theatre, yes—a division I did not know I oversaw until my fourth anniversary at the company, because no one in administration had told me." The veiled insult hung in the air, a reminder of Wirtschafter's frostiness in meetings in the past. "Dave was a big love suck," Cara Stein says. "But he's gotten a lot better—we are pleading with him to be the leader, and he's responding." Wirtschafter acknowledges, "I think I'm entitled to sulk in my office, but in a big room I have a responsibility to be perky."

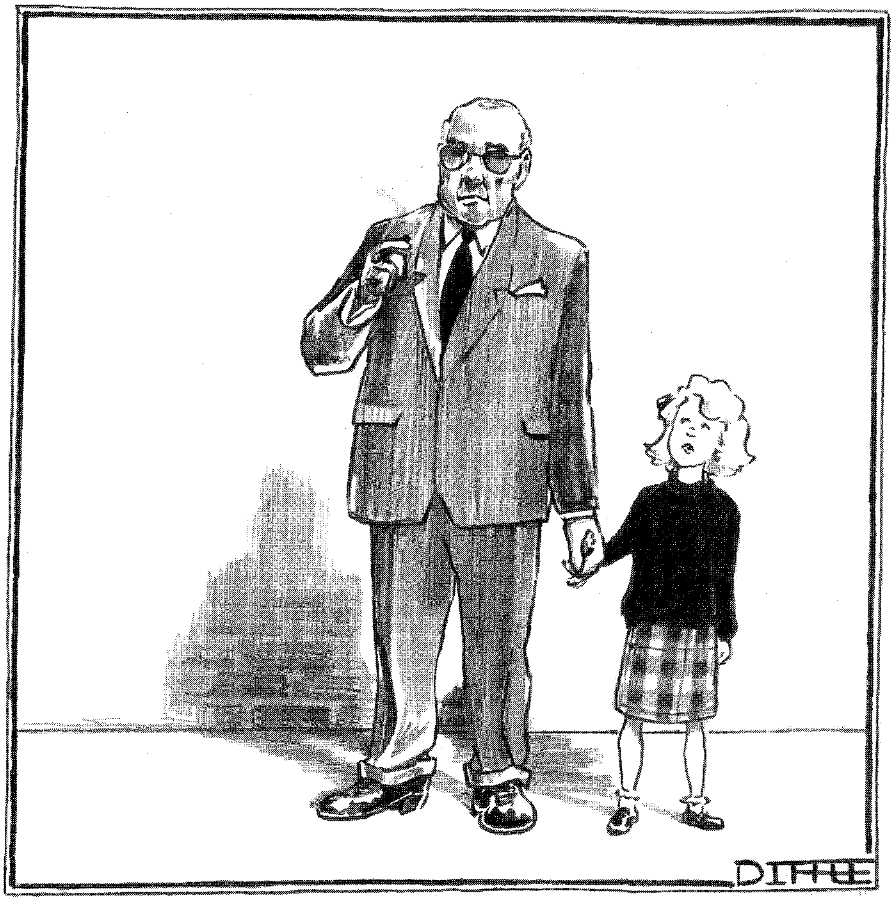
So he shook off his annoyance and began to articulate his vision of a world blanketed in William Morris-brokered entertainment. "If you're going to expand without buying another agency, you have to think of new ways of presenting product," he said, "and that means getting the information we have about scripts to corporations a year ahead of time. Wouldn't it be interesting if J. J. Abrams"—an agency client who created the hit shows "Alias" and "Lost"—"had a deal with Ford, and we brokered that deal and took a lot of dough? And wouldn't it be even more interesting if the synergy between J.J.'s ideas and Ford's ideas began at inception, and Ford could time the release of a new model to the release of J.J.'s film featuring that model? They'd be happier, we'd be happier, and we'd be richer."

People might have had questions—What if J. J. Abrams and Ford have different ideas? Is all artistry simply entertainment, and is all entertainment simply commercial speech?—but Wirtschafter was picking up speed: "Gary Fleder is a director, a very good director, who did 'Runaway Jury.' He is not Steven Spielberg, but every time he directs he gets $4.75 million. So you should want to be part of a team developing lots of projects for him. There has to be an allowance for passion, and you may have a hundred-thousand-dollar writer you believe in, and that's great. But it's no longer 'my list, my people, my stuff.' Because you would have to represent forty-seven and a half one-hundred-thousand-dollar journeymen writers to equal one Gary Fleder movie."

Oddly, Wirtschafter's pitch was beginning to sound like a friendlier version of Mike Ovitz's vision, in which an agency is a smoothly oiled team that looks to its playmaker. "If that philosophy does not fit you, you can go someplace else," Wirtschafter concluded. "This is not an old folks' home, it is not a place that is staid. It is as fast-moving an entertainment entity as any on earth." The applause was enthusiastic, and Wirtschafter smiled and, finally, gave a sheepish half-wave.

The afternoon of the Hylda Queally announcement, Wirtschafter fielded a number of calls from colleagues taking him up on his invitation to discuss the matter. By the time the music agent Mark Geiger phoned, Wirtschafter was feeling beleaguered. "It'll sound like I'm hiding stuff, but she just decided to leave," he said. When he hung up, he shook his head. "I don't get why people are all freaked out. I guess the fear factor would be, one, is C.A.A. so much better? Or, two, are we doing so badly that we cut Hylda's salary and that's why she left?"

Wirtschafter could have allayed con-



"Daddy, can I have a pony killed?"

“There were irregularities in the succession to the throne.”

cerns by revealing that—as two other William Morris executives had told me—Queally was reaping less in commissions than she was being paid. (Queally declined to comment.) As a rule, an agent is expected to bring in three times his or her compensation. When I asked Wirtschafter why he was keeping that issue quiet, he said, “Hylda’s a good person, she’s cool, that’s the legacy. If she were a bad person, then it would be appropriate to take it from the perceptual space into the economic space.”

That same week, Michael Cooper and three other young agents marched into Wirtschafter’s office wearing big grins. “We signed Rob Bowman,” Cooper said. “You, you’re the cleanup hitter—you’re the man!” The quartet burst into applause.

“Please,” Wirtschafter said.

“You brought him home,” Cooper said. Another agent noted that Bowman had been feeling neglected at C.A.A.

“Poor Michael Wimer,” Wirtschafter said with a tinge of regret, referring to Bowman’s former agent. He considers Wimer, outside of such unfortunate interludes, a friend. (Wimer says that he considers Wirtschafter a “professional acquaintance.”) “What I said to Rob is that his career needed a lot of energy, and that Mr. Cooper would devote himself to providing it,” Wirtschafter continued. “I told him that the worst thing he could do is be represented by me, because in a weird sort of way I’m not dissimilar to Michael Wimer: you wouldn’t be No. 1 on our lists, because he represents people like Tony Scott, and I represent people like Ridley Scott.”

“Rob feels badly about Wimer,” one agent said, “because he thinks of him as a friend.”

“I have to say I don’t feel badly, because Rob Bowman was terribly represented,” Wirtschafter said.

That night, just days after being chosen by Warner Bros. to direct “I Am Legend,” Francis Lawrence fired his agent at I.C.M., David Unger. Lawrence then spent a day in his manager’s office meeting with other agents, and Wirtschafter dropped by for a job interview. Afterward, he told me, “I feel I was terrible, because I was honest. I said, ‘I’m thrilled to sit down with you, but would I be your best representative? I want to wait till I see “Constantine” because I have to believe in someone to be good.’ It was clear that he’d outgrown David Unger, because Unger talks to a Jeff Robinov once every three or four months, and I talk to Mr. Smoochy three or four times a day.” Francis Lawrence, apparently, was a subscriber to the bigger/better deal theory. But, as none of the agents fighting over him had seen his work yet, it was uncertain who was agenting whom.

The next day, Wirtschafter heard that the director had been impressed with him. He stood and walked behind his chair and gripped it fiercely. “Now I’ve become competitive,” he said. “It seemed clear that he was going to go to C.A.A., because one of the film’s producers, Akiva Goldsman”—a well-known screenwriter represented by C.A.A.—“has been urging him to for months. But now it’s gone from a thousand to one to one in two: me or C.A.A.”

To neutralize Goldsman, he called the screenwriter and said, “I would imagine, as you know all, you know that I was among the many who sat down with Mr. Lawrence yesterday. I know he relies on your judgment, and I know you would recommend that he go to your place, and you should, because they’ve done such a good job for you. But I felt we had a meeting that went well and was relatively precise, and he may call you. It wouldn’t be right for you to do anything proactive, but I just wanted you to know.” After finishing the call, he told me, “It doesn’t mean anything, but everyone has an ego.”

He called Erwin Stoff, who manages Lawrence and also manages such actors as Keanu Reeves and Ethan Hawke, and said, “You’ve been great, and I wanted to talk with you because I obviously have the resource space to go to Warner and see ‘Constantine’ because of my relationship with Jeff, but I don’t think that’s right, as that opportunity is not available to the other agents.”

“I think that’s the most ethical thing I’ve ever heard,” Stoff said.

“Oh, and I had a lovely chat with

Akiva, and he only called me 'babe' three times in four minutes." After hanging up, he said, "The ethics of the business are that anyone will do anything or lie about anything, but I want to show that, while I have a unique relationship with Warner Bros., I also, I hope, am not an ambulance chaser." He thought for a moment and then added, with a chuckle, "The fact that no one has seen 'Constantine' makes the whole process absurd. I may never see it."

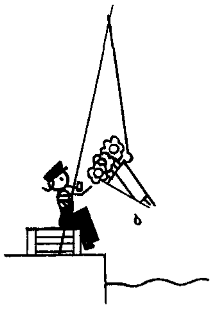
He called Lawrence's lawyer, Gretchen Bruggeman Rush, and laid out for her, in painterly detail, the eight-year development history of "I Am Legend." He mentioned that he'd devised the complex deal that would have got Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was going to star in the film at one time (shortly before he ran for governor), five million dollars if the studio had subsequently been able to make the film with a particular star-and-director combination it had in mind—"terrible meeting with Arnold, because he was so rude in firing an agent here"—and that his client Ridley Scott had just stepped aside so that the studio could go ahead with another director to fit Will Smith's schedule. "It sounds like I'm being mean and catty," he went on, "but there's more information you should know." This included, he said, the fact that two different C.A.A. directors had switched to William Morris because they felt misled by the agency, which had apparently favored other directors from its stable for "I Am Legend" and another film. "So if you think it's appropriate to convey any of that when you speak to Francis . . . ," he said. "And you can tell him that if his decision comes down to me seeing the movie I'm ready to do that anytime."

He hung up and stared at the phone. "I'm so competitive—this is why Ava yells at me." Greenfield drank from her Fiji bottle in silence. Hylda Queally came in to say an emotional goodbye, and then Erwin Stoff dropped by, and by the time he left there were more than forty calls to be returned and three agents waiting in Wirtschafter's outer office and news had come in that the manager of one of his major clients had just met with C.A.A. "Nothing but troubles," Wirtschafter said, sighing. He bit his nails for a moment, and then picked up the phone.

When he got home that night, at nine, his wife was waiting on the living-room sofa, and he gave her a kiss. Dominique had just been telling me how romantic her husband is: "I was shocked at how much I fell in love with him, and how quickly. He writes me love notes in the morning and leaves them for me, little poems."

The Wirtschafters' home, in Santa Monica, is filled with black-and-white photographs taken by Peter Beard, Sebastião Salgado, and Henri Cartier-Bresson, among many others. It is everything his office is not. Wirtschafter dropped his messenger bag full of scripts, knelt down, and wordlessly put his head on the belly of the couple's Newfoundland, Riptide. In the warmer months, he often gets straight into the Jacuzzi, where he is joined by Riptide and Foxy, the cat. "If I'm not totally exhausted by the end of the day, so exhausted I can't speak, then I didn't leave it all at the desk," he once told me.

But days of that sort of success take their toll. "No one grows up wanting to be a talent agent," an agent who represents a number of stars says. "You want to get a job in Hollywood, but you really want to be a director, producer, executive, something you think is dignified. When you're young, it's exciting just to be included—the phone sheet, the trading-floor pace. But you can end up sitting there when your client wins an Academy Award just hoping they say your name." In 1987, Ron Meyer achieved a rare double when his clients Michael Douglas and Cher won the best-actor and best-actress Academy Awards. Neither star mentioned Meyer in accepting the Oscar. Cher did, however, thank her hairdresser.



Wirtschafter moved around the house restlessly, not yet quite fully at home, and finally stood beneath a recessed ceiling light in the front hall. From there, he analyzed Hylda Queally's future at C.A.A., laying out a multivariate equation of success and failure. "The other headline tonight is that the tracking numbers for 'The Grudge' are amazing," he said. "It looks like it'll do twenty-five million"—in fact, Columbia's remake of a Japanese horror film earned forty million dollars that weekend—"and that takes our client Sarah Michelle Gellar, who now is nothing at all, and it makes her a star, potentially. Suddenly, the Sarah Michelle Gellar space is meaningful, and what's interesting about that is—"

"Dave," his wife said, not unkindly. "Dave, please. It's time to stop working."

That Saturday afternoon, Wirtschafter played golf at his club, the Riviera. Normally a meticulous, low-handicap golfer, he kept shanking his pitch shots directly sideways. "How can you be intimidated by something that easy?" he muttered, dropping ball after ball and trying to remedy his stroke between holes. It just got worse. On the back nine, he and his close friend and client Rick Fox, the recently retired captain of the Los Angeles Lakers, bet for the valet parking. They are a striking pair: Fox, six feet seven, handsome and outgoing, and Wirtschafter, nearly a foot shorter and quietly intense. On the eleventh tee, Fox addressed the ball, and then backed off with a grin and looked at Wirtschafter, who had lost the previous hole and was staring at Fox's back. "Get out of my head, Dave," he said.

"If I can't beat you, I will retire," Wirtschafter said.

On the seventeenth hole, with the two men all square, Fox dribbled his tee shot and cried, "Breathe, breathe!" Wirtschafter nailed his drive, and allowed himself a slight smile. "If you beat me, my head would explode," he said.

Victorious, Wirtschafter stood outside the clubhouse as the sun set behind the coconut palms, sweeping his hands in pitch-shot motions. After a moment, he said, "I found out last night that I did not get Francis Lawrence—he went to C.A.A. It's fine, it's totally fine."

Stuffing his hands into the pockets of his shorts, Wirtschafter continued, "The funny thing is that, even before I heard, Ava and Carolyn took me aside and said, 'You gotta stop. You can't work this hard. The worst thing that could happen would be for you to sign another client who's not a Chris Tucker or a Halle Berry, because what the agency needs is stars.' I totally appreciated it—there is a point where you can't do everything, and that point is now. So I'm going to cut back on going to sports meetings." Pitching himself, he said, "I'll just get filled in. I'll do less! Sure. You can't do everything. You can't win everything. You can't be perfect." After a moment, he confessed, "Still, my inclination is to try." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

JESUS IN THE CLASSROOM

Parents loved Cupertino's public schools. Then a teacher said he was being discriminated against as a Christian.

BY PETER J. BOYER

Cupertino, California, is situated at the edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains below San Francisco Bay, sloping eastward into the flatlands of the Santa Clara Valley, more familiarly known as Silicon Valley. The city, which covers roughly eleven square miles, has no downtown, no discernible boundaries, and few physical features that distinguish its broad boulevards and strip malls from those of its neighboring communities, such as Sunnyvale. Cupertino is home to Apple Computer, Inc., and several other high-tech firms, but the town's greatest distinction, its deepest source of civic pride, is its public school system.

Last year, the Cupertino Union School District attained a score of 919 out of a possible 1,000 on the state's Academic Performance Index, and one of its elementary schools achieved a perfect rating. Cupertino has two of the state's top three middle and elementary schools, and two of its high schools have been ranked among the nation's best.

House hunters in the Silicon Valley carefully study school-district maps before making a purchase offer, and for many acquiring a Cupertino address is an important factor in planning their families. The address comes at a premium, with houses bearing an average price of nearly a million dollars. The homes are not especially grand, tending toward a "Brady Bunch" subdivision architectural style, but even when the high-tech stock crash devastated portfolios Cupertino home values increased at double-digit rates (thirty-eight per cent in the past year). "It's absolutely the schools, no question," says Maria Segal, a local real-estate agent, and a parent of three Cupertino students. "It means a difference of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars over comparable houses in other locations."

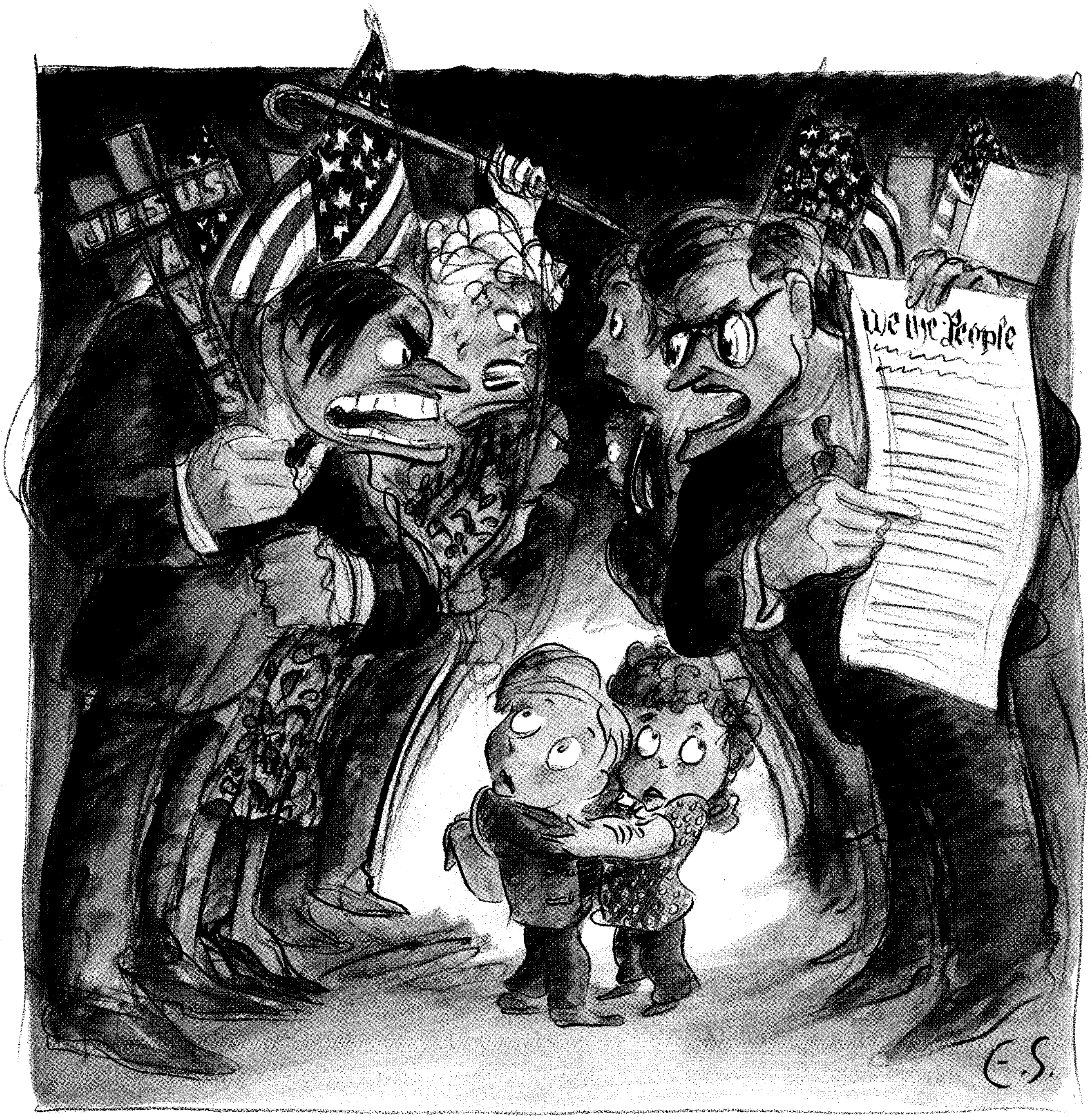
The success of Cupertino's schools is partly a function of demography. In most families, at least one parent works in the high-tech industry. Those children who struggle in school (apparently few) are likely to find volunteer tutoring help from a class mother who holds a Ph.D. Cupertino is proudly diverse (the school district's Web site boasts of a student body "representing forty-five different languages"), although it is diversity of a particular sort. The town's population, of fifty thousand, is roughly half white and half Asian, with very few Hispanics and fewer than five hundred African-Americans. The city has almost no low-income housing. The parents of Cupertino's schoolchildren tend to be well-paid strivers (earning a median income of a hundred thousand dollars) with a profound faith in the deterministic power of education. The Cupertino *Courier*, the local weekly, has reported that some immigrants from China and India migrate to the Bay Area strategically, with the aim of working their way up to Cupertino in time for their kids to enroll in middle school. "You get a lot of pressure to have the children do well," Sarah Beetem, a fifth-grade teacher, says. "That's partly because these parents have had to do well in their home countries in order to get the jobs that allowed them to come to the U.S. They were at the top of their classes all along. They believe in hard work. I never have problems with kids not doing their homework."

Cupertino is a town that, more than most places, measures its prosperity, both civil and individual, by the state of its schools. That is why the community was so deeply struck when, late last fall, Cupertino's schools attracted national attention of an unwelcome sort. In November, a fifth-grade teacher named Stephen Williams brought a federal civil-rights claim against his school's principal and the Cupertino Union School District, asserting that he had been discriminated against because he is a Christian. Williams said that he had been stopped from distributing historical documents to his students because the documents mentioned God.

News of the lawsuit broke during Thanksgiving week, as the city's schools were beginning the long holiday weekend. Larry Woodard, a computer-networking executive who has a child at Stevens Creek Elementary in Cupertino, learned of the suit on Thanksgiving Eve, when he opened his laptop computer and visited his home Web page, the Drudge Report. Its headline declared: "DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BANNED AT CALIFORNIA SCHOOL!"

Woodard was not surprised. He considers himself a social conservative, and he was always reading about some new outrage in the public schools, often just forty miles up the freeway. "I'm used to seeing things like this—you know, kids are being prohibited from learning about Christianity as it relates to our history," he recalls. "Just look at the students in San Francisco, or Berkeley, where kids are being forced to go live the week in a burka but they're not allowed to learn about the basic foundation of our nation." Woodard opened the Drudge link to a Reuters dispatch, and was dismayed to read that the town that had "banned" the Declaration was Cupertino and that the school involved was Stevens Creek Elementary. Woodard thought there had to be some mistake. He and his wife had found their home in Cupertino by handing their real-estate agent a school-district map showing the school's boundaries, and saying, "Those are your parameters." As a volunteer at the school, and a member of the Parent-Teacher Organization, Woodard had been impressed, discerning at Stevens Creek "none of this P.C. baloney that is so common in schools."

Reading on, he learned that the offended teacher was represented by the Alliance Defense Fund, a nationwide organization of Christian attorneys engaged in battleground culture issues, such

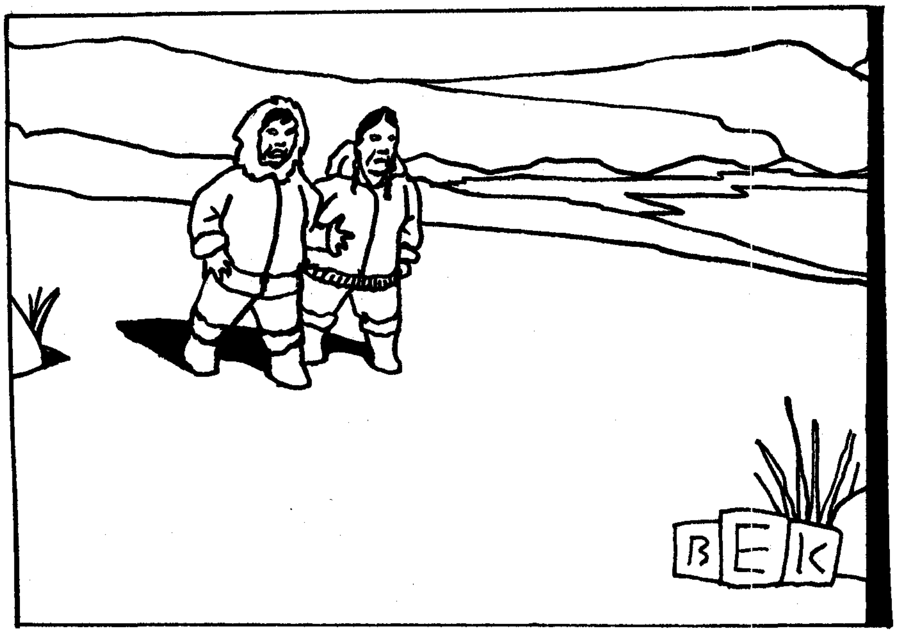


After conservatives claimed that the Declaration of Independence had been banned, the principal began getting threats.

EDWARD SOREL

as abortion and same-sex marriage. Woodard, a devoted Scout leader, knew that the A.D.F. had been instrumental in the legal fight that eventually resulted in a Supreme Court ruling allowing the Boy Scouts to bar homosexuals from becoming Scout leaders. Just last year, the A.D.F. had helped to persuade the California Supreme Court to stop San Francisco's Mayor Gavin Newsom from issuing same-sex marriage licenses. Woodard says he doesn't object to gay civil unions, but he believes that "marriage is a thing, through history, between a man and a woman for the propagation of the species, and I personally object to the shifting definition of terms within our culture." Impressed by the A.D.F.'s achievements, Woodard had sent a donation to the organization, which is based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Still digesting the news that his school district was now being sued by the A.D.F., Woodard checked his e-mail and saw that he had a growing list of incoming messages. Some of them were from the office, but many more were from strangers, who let Woodard know that the Stevens Creek principal, Patricia Vidmar, should be fired, and that Woodard himself was, in all likelihood, a godless subversive. The news of the lawsuit, which had been filed in a federal court in Oakland two days earlier, was beginning to excite outrage on talk radio and among right-wing bloggers. One online poster had provided details on how to contact the Cupertino school authorities, and Woodard's e-mail address and telephone number were listed on the school's Web site. Woodard says that he and his family spent Thanksgiving week-



"When we first started seeing each other, we would always use the same word for snow."

• •

end "in a state of shock," and unplugged their phone to avoid an onslaught of calls.

When Woodard drove his child to Stevens Creek the following Monday, armed sheriff's deputies had been posted near the school grounds. Patti Vidmar had also received many e-mails of protest over the holiday weekend. Some politely urged her to change her mind; some were more vulgar. ("I can only say, you people up there are wayyyyyy fucked up. Thank you.") At least one e-mail employed language that was truly vile, and seemed to convey a threat: "Run Patricia, Run!! . . . Fuck you very much communist cunt!!!!!! Hope to see you soon."

In December, Sean Hannity, the conservative New York-based commentator, moved his Fox News Channel television show "Hannity & Colmes" to Cupertino for a special hour-long feature called "Take Back America." Broadcasting live from the performing-arts theatre at the local college, Hannity took to the stage and read the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, and asked, "As a nation, when these words of Thomas Jefferson fall on deaf ears, where are we? Or perhaps they fall on no ears at all. Because that is what some people say has happened right here in Cupertino."

To conservative politicians and commentators, Cupertino had provided the perfect illustration of secular liberal lunacy. Newt Gingrich, on the talk-show circuit for a book tour, made the Cupertino case part of his routine. "I think that is literally an attack on the very core concept of America," Gingrich told Katie Couric on the "Today" show. "I think all too many schools are afraid to teach about American history, afraid to teach about the Founding Fathers, and afraid to tell people the unique characteristics that make America different than anyplace else in the world."

The parents at Stevens Creek were dismayed by these developments, and many of them were quite indignant. Part of their anger was over the hint of menace now in the air around their school, but part of it was because the lawsuit and its aftermath challenged the community's self-image. "People were really surprised," Sarah Beetem, Stephen Williams's fifth-grade teaching colleague, said. "It was like, 'Not here!' It's probably the most successfully diverse community that I've ever seen. Here it's sort of everybody gets along, there's lots of different cultures, we have culture-day parades. People generally get along very well and are very tolerant."

Larry Woodard, for one, was also perplexed. He and other parents quickly found out that Mrs. Vidmar had not banned the Declaration of Independence. A copy of the document was hanging in the school library, and it was included in the fifth-grade textbook. What Mrs. Vidmar had done was stop Stephen Williams from handing out a three-paragraph excerpt that featured the Founders' beseeching of "their Creator" and "Divine Providence." Woodard saw the lawsuit as "an attack on our schools, it's an attack on us," but he had seen Stephen Williams at school and thought he seemed like "a genuinely nice man, a fine, upstanding man." Williams had been at Stevens Creek Elementary for six years, and was well liked by his students and by his peers. "I feel bad for the guy," Woodard says. "I think, frankly, that he was kind of duped. I think that he was used as a tool by the A.D.F. to promote their agenda."

The activism of evangelical Christians, the rise of what is called the Christian right, is generally attributed to the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling, which effectively legalized abortion, but the stirrings of a profound cultural disaffection actually began more than a decade earlier. In 1962, the Court, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, ruled on Engel v. Vitale—a decision that, in the view of many conservative Christians, amounted to an eviction of God from the classroom.

Before that ruling, religion and public education had mixed to a degree that would later seem unimaginable. Some middle-aged New Yorkers can remember attending Cardinal Spellman Clubs, or their Jewish equivalent, in public schools. They can remember, too, beginning each school day with a ritual recitation:

> Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, and our Country.

The prayer had been composed by the New York State Board of Regents, as a way of honoring the nation's "spiritual heritage" without offending any particular denomination. The Herricks Union Free School District of New Hyde Park was among those which required the daily devotional, and it prompted a protest by a group of parents in the district. Joined by the American Civil Liberties Union, the parents, on behalf of ten students, filed suit against the district, claiming that the daily prayer violated the First Amendment's "establishment clause," directing that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The parents lost their case, and an appeal, in state courts before the Supreme Court accepted it. The attorneys general from New Jersey, Connecticut, and twenty other states filed amici-curiae briefs on behalf of the school district. The court, by a six-to-one vote, ruled the prayer unconstitutional. Billy Graham decried the ruling ("The framers of the Constitution meant we were to have freedom *of* religion, not freedom *from* religion"), and Senator Sam Ervin, of North Carolina, wondered whether "the Supreme Court has held that God is unconstitutional." Congress undertook hearings on prayer in schools. "Impeach Earl Warren" billboards appeared along the nation's highways.

But the course was set. Other court rulings expanded upon Engel, and public-education administrators, facing the prospect of lawsuits, disentangled themselves from activities that could be interpreted as an endorsement of religion. State universities adopted rules forbidding student religious groups from using school facilities that were available to other registered campus groups. Some public-school districts felt obliged to forbid overt individual prayer. Beyond campus, strict state-church separatists, often backed by the A.C.L.U., pushed the issue into the public square, gaining the removal of Christmas crèches and other religious symbols from municipal sites across the country.

Many Christians considered themselves in the curious position of a marginalized, even persecuted majority. On the whole, the mainline, progressive Protestant denominations did not take up their cause—and saw their memberships decline—even as the evangelical movement experienced explosive growth. Roe v. Wade's legalization of abortion finally touched off a Christian backlash, spawning such groups as the Moral Majority and, later, the Christian Coalition in an effort to turn the American political mainstream from its secular course by mobilizing conservative Christian voters.

The corollary to these political efforts was an attempt to roll back some of the legal gains made by the A.C.L.U. and its allies on the secular left. A handful of attorneys began to take up the cause of Christian litigation, or what became known as "religious freedom" cases, and as the Supreme Court became more conservative they began to achieve important victories. First among them was the landmark 1981 Widmar v. Vincent decision, with the Court ruling that the University of Missouri (Kansas City) could not constitutionally bar a registered religious group from equal access to the university's facilities. In 1984, an election year that produced a Reagan landslide, Congress expanded on the Widmar decision with passage of the Equal Access Act, extending access to religious groups in public secondary schools.

The most prominent of the new Christian litigators was Jay Sekulow, a Brooklyn-born Jew who had converted to Christianity while attending college. A fierce and nimble courtroom litigator, Sekulow argued, and won, several First Amendment cases before the Supreme Court in the nineteen-nineties, including a key 1990 victory (Westside Community Board of Education v. Mergens) that upheld the constitutionality of the Equal Access Act. Sekulow was twice named one of the "100 Most Influential Lawyers" by the *National Law Journal*, and came to be revered by evangelicals as a Christian Clarence Darrow. Now the evangelicals wanted their own A.C.L.U. In 1990, Sekulow became the chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, founded and initially funded by the television evangelist Pat Robertson.

Three years later, an alliance of conservative mega-ministries—including Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, Campus Crusade for Christ, and the Florida-based Coral Ridge Ministries—established the Alliance Defense Fund. The A.D.F. began as a funding pool for Christian litigation ("a type of giant Religious Right ATM," an opposition group called it), underwriting lawsuits and developing litigation strategy for allied lawyers across the country, including Sekulow's group.

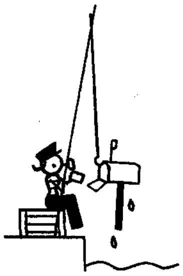
To run the operation, the founding

THE SPECIALS
Today we're featuring a mélange of tuna and celery hearts in a fresh Hellmann's sauce, presented with a side of carrot lardoons.
We are also serving a peanut purée, lightly garnished with jelled grape essence and nestled on a bed of pain blanc.
Would you like a moment to decide?

ministers hired a former federal prosecutor named Alan Sears, who had been executive director of the Reagan Justice Department's Meese Commission on pornography. The A.D.F.'s mission includes the marquee culture frays—abortion and gay marriage—but its core issue is the church-state tension inherent in the First Amendment. The A.D.F.'s purpose is to dismantle what its literature refers to as "the so-called 'wall of separation'" between church and state, and the alliance has had a hand in two dozen cases before the Supreme Court in the past decade.

In the A.D.F. view, the "wall of separation" (Justice Hugo Black's term, quoting Jefferson), as currently understood, is a false construct erected by forty years of bad court rulings and cowed public bureaucrats, and had to be demolished. Two key cases in New York, where Engel v. Vitale itself had originated, helped to dismantle this wall. The first, Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches School District, was argued before the Court by Jay Sekulow in 1993, and indirectly involved one of the A.D.F.'s founding ministries, Dobson's Focus on the Family. Lamb's Chapel, an evangelical church on Long Island, had sought the use of a local school building for an after-school showing of a Dobson film, "Turn Your Heart Toward Home." The district refused, citing its own rule, created to avoid church-state entanglements, that forbade use of school facilities by any religious organization. The Court, affirming (and slightly expanding) its Widmar decision, ruled 9–0 in the church's favor. More important, perhaps, was Justice Antonin Scalia's concurring opinion, joined by Justice Clarence Thomas. The Justices, part of an important faction of the Rehnquist Court, were inclined to do away with an important piece of case law governing church-state questions—the so-called "Lemon test" (named after a plaintiff), which held that any state action must be ruled unconstitutional if it had the purpose or primary effect of promoting religion. Scalia saw benefit in state encouragement of religious faith, and has cited Justice William O. Douglas's words from a 1952 ruling (often invoked by religious conservatives): "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being."

The second case, decided in 2001, involved a pastor who wanted to conduct meetings of his after-school youth group, the Good News Club, in a Milford school room. The Milford district declined, likening the Good News Club to a mid-week Sunday-school worship meeting, and the minister filed suit. Again, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of opening school grounds to religious activity, deciding that if school facilities were generally open to any outside group, such as the Boy Scouts, they could not be closed to religion.



Taken together, such decisions mapped a remarkable turn in the abiding quandary of church-state tensions on the school grounds. Not only prayer but actual worship was now back in the classroom, albeit after school hours. Such victories energized evangelical Christians. And loosened their wallets. Today, the A.D.F. has an annual budget nearing twenty million dollars, and Sears, its director, has expanded the organization far beyond its original role of funding and strategy coördination. The A.D.F. has its own in-house direct-litigation team (including a "same-sex marriage division") to complement the force of some seven hundred and fifty allied lawyers nationwide.

Sears also began an ambitious training-and-education program, designed to inculcate in lawyers the constitutional nuances of Christian litigation. The A.D.F. operates what it calls a National Litigation Academy, which is really an intensive seminar provided to attorneys in exchange for the promise of devoting four hundred and fifty hours of pro-bono work in the cause of Christian litigation. The organization provides law students with Blackstone Legal Fellowships, which offer a crash course in Biblical and natural law. It is finding no shortage of students eager for instruction, including many from top-tier secular universities—what participants jokingly call "the University of Babylon." ("The main campus would be in Cambridge.")

Not least, the A.D.F. runs a national media department, which is adept at exploiting the fact that the secular left is increasingly defined, in the minds of many, not by what it is for but by what it is supposedly against—Christmas, the Boy Scouts, the Pledge of Allegiance, and traditional marriage. If the recent holiday season seemed especially disputatious, it is partly because of the A.D.F.'s Christmas Project, which included broadcast ads and mass mailings to thousands of schools proclaiming, "It's Okay to Say Merry Christmas." The project highlighted the secular excesses of various municipal entities—holiday parades in which Christmas symbols were banned, school concerts without carols, and so on—and the subject filled columns and occupied talk shows for weeks.

When the organization takes on a new case, the media department quickly summarizes the facts in stark terms ("No More Discrimination Against Louisiana Pro-Lifers") and dispatches a release to its lengthy media list—national and local, secular and religious. Eric Finley, who writes the releases, says that he never knows when the media is going to bite, although it could not have been hard to predict interest in the Cupertino case ("Declaration of Independence Banned from Classroom").

Stephen Williams's admirers regard him as a born teacher, a man of abundant patience and gentle bearing, in the Mister Rogers mold. His sunny aspect and ingenuous manner (producing such exclamations as "Really neat!") seem infinitely better suited to a grade-school classroom than to the world of finance, which had been his first career.

Williams had come to California as a boy, when his father, a Cornell computer-sciences professor, was hired by I.B.M. in San Jose. Stephen attended Cupertino schools, and became a competitive swimmer at the University of California at Berkeley, where he majored in economics and sang in the men's a-cappella chorus. After college, Williams went to work for an economic consulting firm in Berkeley, but he quickly found corporate life a bad fit. He returned to school for a teaching certificate, and when he was hired by the Cupertino district, eight years ago, he believed he had found his calling.

Williams came to agree wholeheartedly with the consensus about Cupertino's schools, and he decided that Stevens Creek was the best of them. He enjoyed the staff, and he admired the school's principal, Patti Vidmar. He was con-

SECRETS

You climbed Hawk's Crag, a cell phone in your baggy shorts,
and gazed into the leafing trees and famous blue water.
You telephoned, in love with the skin of the world. I heard you
puff as you started to climb down, still talking, switching
your phone from hand to hand as the stone holds required.

You sang show tunes sitting above me, clicking your fingers,
swaying your shadowy torso. We attended to each other
in a sensuous dazzle as global as suffering
until gradual gathering spilled like water over the stone dam
and we soared level across the long-lived lake.

•

But how
can one flesh and consciousness adhere to another,
knowing that every adherence ends in separation? I longed
for your return, your face lit by a candle, your smile
private as a kore's under an inconstant flame—and dreamt
I stared into the flat and black of water, afraid to drown.

•

It is half a year since we slept beside each other all night.
I wake hollow as a thighbone with its marrow picked out.
In falling snow, a crow pecks under the empty bird feeder.

When the house lights go out in wind and heavy snow,
the afternoon already black, I lie frightened in darkness
on the unsheeted bed. No one comes to my door.
Old age concludes in making wills and trusts and inventories,
in knees that buckle going downstairs. Wretched in airless
solitude, I want to call you,
but if you hear my voice
you will unplug your telephone and lie awake until morning.

•

I remember you striding toward me, hands in jean pockets,
each step decisive, smiling as if you knew that the cool
air kept a secret, but might be cajoled into revealing it.

—*Donald Hall*

stantly amazed by the quality of his students (one of whom once volunteered to explain quantum theory to him), and, in turn, most parents were impressed by Williams. Joanne Campbell, who is a single mother, says that her son Ryan had difficulty at Stevens Creek until he landed in Williams's class. "My son has had several problems with teachers in this school—just not getting along with him, or being too forceful with him. And Ryan, from the minute he was in his classroom, loved him, and said so when he first came home. I think he's wonderful. When I first met him, I thought, Wow, what a sweet guy."

Williams was happy in his work, and he would amuse his colleagues at lunchtime with tales of the single life. But in truth his personal life was deeply unsettled, filled with what he now recalls as "a lot of searching and seeking." He considered himself a nominal Christian, though not necessarily a deep believer. He found himself drawn to a church with an evangelical character, and soon he was joining church groups and establishing a new circle of friends. On the morning of April 16, 2001, the day after Easter, Williams awoke before dawn, seized by an urge to read the Bible. "I didn't know where to begin," he recalls, "and decided on John, since that is my middle name."

It was a fateful choice. Of the four Gospels, John's is the account that most forcefully and directly portrays Jesus as the son of God, the redemptive gift to man. The narrative is not uncommonly associated with personal conversion dramas, such as the one Williams experienced that morning. "All I can say is that, as I started reading, this overwhelming conviction that it was all true filled me to the depths of my heart and soul," he says. "All previous times of reading the Bible, I felt that it just didn't really apply to me. This time, I couldn't put the book down. After denying it for most of my life, I now knew in my heart that passages like 'Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' were completely true. As I read passages like John 15:26—'When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me'—I knew that the Holy Spirit was doing that very thing in that moment as I was reading the Book of John. It was the most important, transformational moment in my life."

Williams felt compelled to share his experience. In the coming days, he sent e-mails describing his transformation to his colleagues at school. He told them about feeling random bursts of sudden, uncontrollable joy, and of driving on the freeway with tears flowing down his face. His lunchroom talk was now about his salvation, and when the 2002-03 yearbook was dedicated to Williams and two other teachers, he contributed an autobiographical portrait that amounted to a testimonial to Christ. "I thank the Lord daily for revealing himself to me and his son Jesus Christ," he wrote, "and setting me free from living a meaningless existence, to one of such purpose, filled with more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control than I ever thought possible. Praise the Lord for saving us from being lost, and setting us free to enjoy life the way God created it to be."

"Mr. Williams was a brand-new Christian—I mean, just brand, spanking new," says Kim Item, a Stevens Creek parent who met Williams at a prayer group. "I, too, had had a radical experience with God. When I met Mr. Williams that day, his whole face was lit up. And he goes, 'I just met Jesus Christ!' and he was all excited. And I was just sitting there, quiet, because I know exactly what a radical testimony is."

Perhaps inevitably, Williams began to think about his work in a new light. He studied the state's content standards for public schools, and took the measure of the curriculum that he had been teaching. As it happens, California's standards for teaching fifth-grade history are filled with references to the importance of religion in the nation's founding—"Describe the religious aspects of the earliest colonies," "Identify the significance and leaders of the First Great Awakening," and so on—so much so that when the standards were first published at least one atheist group complained that they improperly favored religion. Williams says that he began to see a discrepancy between the state's standards and the history curriculum that he was teaching. "If you look through the textbook, you can see where there are holes."

Williams made it his purpose to fill those holes. "What I felt obligated to do as an educator was to teach the California standards," he says. "And so I've tried to supplement materials where necessary."

The fifth-grade history textbook used in many California schools is McGraw-Hill's "A New Nation: Adventures in Time and Place," which is a model of multicultural sensitivity. One of the book's authors is Dr. James A. Banks, an influential authority on, and proponent of, multiculturalism in education. Banks has advanced such ideas as "a pedagogy of liberation," by which classroom instruction is freed from the one-way recitation of perceived "facts" and opened to a joint teacher-student learning exercise about the relativistic nature of human experience. In teaching about America's westward expansion, for example, the instructor might ask students to consider the meaning of the word "west": "It wasn't west to the Lakota Sioux," Banks has observed. "It was the center of the universe. That was their home."

The textbook presents the nation's founding as a sort of pageant of ethnicities. The Declaration of Independence is indeed included in full, along with an annotated version for ten- and eleven-year-olds. The annotated version omits all references to "nature's God," "Creator," and "Divine Providence." To the subject of the Great Awakening, the religious convulsion that arguably helped feed the fires of the American Revolution, the textbook accords only brief mention.

For Williams, teaching the Founders' faith by using the Declaration was an easy enough task; he excerpted and photocopied the paragraphs mentioning "nature's God," "their Creator," and "Divine Providence." For other supplementary material, he turned to the Internet. Eventually, he came upon the Web site of an organization that seemed ideally suited to his circumstances. It was called Gateways to Better Education, and its motto summed up its purpose: "Keeping the Faith in Public Schools."

The Gateways Web site includes a link to an article advising teachers on ways to emphasize Christian faith in school ("Get a copy of your state standards. Know your rights and your students' rights") and offers various resources to Christian teachers, including a link to the organization's Holiday Restoration Campaign, in which holidays are an occasion to teach about the day's religious foundations. Holiday Restoration cards—pamphlets that point out cracks in the church-state wall—are offered for sale at the Web site's online store. One of them, an eight-page Easter card, features the Easter Bunny, who explains that the true meaning of Easter is rebirth through Jesus Christ. "The teacher raises all the objections commonly heard from public school educators," the promotional material explains, "but in this story, the smart little bunny is very familiar with U.S. court cases. He helps the teacher understand that teaching about Jesus at Easter is legally permitted. The card also includes legal documentation, Constitutionally-sound lesson plan ideas, and more!"

Williams ordered a batch of those Easter cards and distributed them to his colleagues, stuffing their boxes at school. He also prepared an Easter assignment, derived from the card. The assignment asked students to choose from among such options as writing an essay on themes from the Gospel of Luke (betrayal, sacrifice, and resurrection); re-

Victoria Roberts

"Let's pretend we're divorced for the day."

viewing some of the teachings of Jesus, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, and applying its lessons to modern life; and interviewing a Christian family about the meaning of Easter.

Using the Web and other resources, Williams compiled a package of supplementary material, including Samuel Adams's "The Rights of the Colonists," William Penn's "Frame of Government," and John Adams's diary—each of which contained pointedly religious allusions. Williams also made copies of excerpts from "George Washington's Prayer Journal" (a document of uncertain historical authenticity), the history of "In God We Trust" on currency and coins, the history of Presidential proclamations of a National Day of Prayer, and, more obscurely, "The Principals of Natural Law," by the Swiss jurist Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui.

Although this supplementary material became the center of the dispute in Cupertino and the cause of Williams's lawsuit, the material itself is not what got Stephen Williams into trouble at Stevens Creek. History is only one of the subjects that Williams taught, and the materials represented a tiny fraction—he claims less than five per cent—of the supplements he prepared. In any case, only one of the documents, the Day of Prayer proclamation, was ever actually distributed to the class. What got Williams in trouble was his enthusiastic expression of faith.

In June, 2003, Williams married a woman he met at his church, a Ph.D. candidate in microbiology at Stanford. Last summer, they had a child, a baby girl, whom they named Magdalene Deborah. Williams e-mailed the news to his Stevens Creek colleagues, adding the note that, just as Mary Magdalene had been Jesus' friend, he hoped that his Maggie would love Jesus, too. It was the sort of sentiment that Williams felt free to share with the school community, partly because the principal, Patti Vidmar, had fostered an atmosphere of tolerance at the school. Williams had come to her last year with plans to start a Good News Club at Stevens Creek, and Mrs. Vidmar shepherded the plan through the district for approval. Vidmar, who is a Christian, also supported a mothers' prayer group, and otherwise seemed relaxed about the propinquity of religious expression and the schoolroom. Kim Item, the Christian parent at Stevens Creek who has spoken of her own "radical experience" with God, recollects stopping by the school one day with a stack of leaflets announcing her church's Easter picnic at a nearby park. "I walked into the office," Item says, "and I said, 'Can I pass these out on the school grounds?' And the school secretary said, 'No! We cannot have you pass out anything religious at this school.' Well, Mrs. Vidmar pipes up and she goes, 'Let me see one of those.' And she looks at it and she goes, 'Well, I don't see anything wrong with this. This is a church that's having an Easter-egg hunt at a park.' And that was my first experience with Mrs. Vidmar."

Williams did not realize that his new zeal was becoming a subject of school talk and, to some, a matter of concern. "We have Jewish teachers, we have all kinds of Christian teachers, we have a Muslim aide, we have a lot of Hindu parents," says Williams's colleague Sarah Beetem. "People sort of said, 'Well, O.K., but he's kind of heavy into this, and he doesn't really need to tell us all these things.'"

Parents are a common presence at Stevens Creek (the "parents' mafia," one mother calls it), and those parents who didn't already know about Williams's religious experience soon heard. Now classroom discussion of religion, which had not been controversial before, began to be considered in a new context.

"The crux of the problem is, if you look at Mr. Williams in general, he was extremely vocal about his beliefs," says Armineh Noravian, a Stevens Creek mother whose son was in Williams's class last year, when the troubles began. "If you talk to teachers, they'll tell you that he was very vocal about his beliefs outside the classroom. And I believe what happened is that his behavior carried inside the classroom. You would notice that he wore a Jesus ring, he had a little Cross pin that he wore in class. He had a Bible and some worship CDs on his desk. And he would sometimes talk about his Bible classes, and about singing Bible songs with his Bible buddies over the weekend. It's not hard for a ten- or eleven-year-old kid to pick up that this man is a devout Christian, a practicing Christian who loves his faith and is very serious about it. It was not hard for him to establish, very early in the year, who he was and what his religious beliefs were."

Noravian says that she heard similar concerns from other parents. She became alert to signs of proselytizing in Williams's class.

According to Williams, one morning soon after the start of the 2003-04 school year, his class had just finished reciting the Pledge of Allegiance when a student asked why the Pledge included the words "under God." The effort by a California man to have the reciting of the Pledge in school declared unconstitutional was in the news at the time, and Williams invited a classroom discussion of the subject. "At the end of the day, my principal came in and asked, 'What are you doing teaching about God?'" Williams recalls. "And I was kind of taken aback a little bit. But then I thought back and said, 'O.K., it must have been the "under God" discussion we had for a few minutes,' and I explained what happened. And she said, 'O.K., that sounds reasonable.' But that was kind of the start to this."

A parent had heard about the discussion and called Patti Vidmar. The scene was repeated a few weeks later, after a classroom discussion of Christopher Columbus. Williams told the class that one of Columbus's roles in his expedition was as a Christian missionary, and he explained that a Christian is "someone who follows the teachings of Jesus Christ." Again, Mrs. Vidmar appeared in his classroom moments after the school day ended and asked about the Columbus discussion. Williams says that she seemed satisfied by his explanation, but he began to sense trouble. "The pattern had developed that almost anytime there was a reference to God or Christianity or Jesus a student would go home and obviously tell a parent, and the parent would call immediately to Patti, and then Patti's in my room within twenty minutes," he says. "It was a really efficient process."

Williams began to try to preëmpt the process by reviewing with Vidmar in advance those assignments that he feared might inspire protest. His class had read "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," C. S. Lewis's fanciful tale of betrayal, sacrifice, and forgiveness, which is often read as a Christian allegory. Williams showed Vidmar an assignment sheet he'd used in the past, which included nine suggested activities, one of which was to discuss the Narnia tale as an allegory. Vidmar questioned the assignment, but approved it. In November, 2003, she sat in on his lesson about Thanksgiving. The winter holidays passed without incident, and Williams taught a multicultural holiday lesson, spread out over the course of several days.

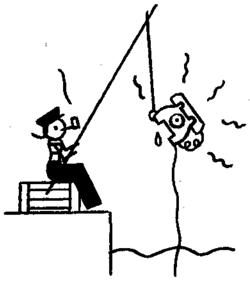
In April, 2004, Williams distributed his Easter card, featuring the Constitution-wise bunny with tips for Christian teachers, to his colleagues. Some of the teachers weren't pleased. "I find it offensive that he feels he needs to proselytize to the rest of the teachers," Sarah Beetem says. "For one thing, there are some who are Jewish. And for those of us who are Christian, excuse me, but I belong to my own church. I am not interested in having you tell me that this is what you should do. I know what I'm supposed to do in a public school." Shortly thereafter, Williams presented his Easter assignment to Vidmar for approval. "Easter and Christianity should not be part of your classroom instruction or discussions," she wrote to him in an e-mail, denying approval. She told Williams that he was being "insensitive to our diverse religious community by insisting on focusing on your own beliefs in the classroom."

Williams noted that there had been no complaint about his winter-holiday assignments, when he asked his students to explore the origins of Hanukkah, or during Dewali, when he explained the Hindu festival of lights. When studying Ramadan, he asked his students to consult primary sources, such as the Koran. "You're applauded for teaching about other religions," he says. "But as soon as God or Christianity or Jesus Christ comes up, there's this immediate 'Oops, separation of church and state—that's not O.K.' "

Patti Vidmar was in a bind. Parents had complained about Williams, and parents, she knew, talked to other parents. "I can tell you that a lot of parents, including some I know personally, complained about Mr. Williams," says John Bartas, who has three kids at Stevens Creek. "Two Jewish parents that I know of, they seemed to be the most unhappy ones—well before the lawsuit. There'd been a general scuttlebutt in the parents' community that sooner or later somebody was going to sue the school over Williams's proselytizing."

Mark Davis, a San Jose attorney who represents the school district, says that Vidmar was trying to protect Williams and the district. "She really tried to be careful with this," he says. "She thought she was helping him, because his materials, and some of his discussions, were generating parental complaints. And she said, 'Just for your own good, there are certain areas I don't think you should go into.' " But Williams was determined. Early last May, he distributed a handout to his class that he did not clear with Vidmar. It was the history of the National Day of Prayer proclamations, with President Bush's proclamation printed on one side of the sheet. When Armineh Noravian saw it, she e-mailed a complaint to Williams and sent a copy to Mrs. Vidmar. It was the first complaint against Williams that had a name attached to it.

"He established himself and the Founding Fathers as Christians," Noravian says. "So that's the American past, and he himself, the teacher—that's a big authority figure. He then brought into the formula another person who calls himself a Christian—this is George W. Bush. . . . Now you have him linking himself to the Founding Fathers and to the current President, with this glue of Christianity and the glue of prayer. Now, even an adult would be scared to stand up and question this guy, let alone an eleven-year-old."



After Noravian's complaint, Vidmar, having consulted with the district, insisted on approving in advance anything that Williams planned to distribute to his class. That week, Williams says, he showed the principal a stack of material from which he might choose one or more handouts for a class lesson on the influence of religion on the Founders. This material included writings of John Adams, the clauses in various state constitutions establishing religion, Washington's "Prayer Journal," "The First Prayer in Congress," excerpts from Blackstone's "Commentaries" on natural law, and a page of quotes called "What Great Leaders Have Said About the Bible." (The page quoted nine Presidents and Jesus.) Vidmar told Williams that he could not distribute or discuss any of the documents. He then proposed a shorter list of three documents: the three paragraphs excerpted from the Declaration of Independence and excerpts from William Penn's "Frame of Government" and from Samuel Adams's "The Rights of the Colonists."

Vidmar wrote to Williams, "The materials you submitted yesterday are once again of a religious nature and are not appropriate to be used with your fifth grade students because the district honors separation of church and state in school." She asked to see Williams's weekly lesson plans for the rest of the semester, and warned him that if he continued his effort to introduce religion into the classroom he would be disciplined.

"On the one hand, yes, it was the Declaration of Independence that he wanted to distribute, or part of it," says Davis, the school-district attorney. "But, on the other hand, if you looked at the packet, you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that this whole packet is geared toward religion and, in particular, Christianity. He was pulling out bits and pieces of it, and I think that was the problem the principal had."

Williams decided to get in touch with an attorney. "What was happening to me in this situation was not right," he says. "I just wanted to teach the California standards accurately. I felt like the policies that were put in place over me were preventing me from doing my job." As it happened, the Gateways to Better Education Web site has a link to James Dobson's Focus on the Family site, which has a link to the Alliance Defense Fund.

Lawyers from the A.D.F. and the school district exchanged letters and phone calls last spring, but the conflict remained unresolved when the new school year began. About a month into the term, Williams and Vidmar sat down for his annual "goals conference," in which the teacher broadly outlines his instruction plans for the school year. Williams says Vidmar brought along a packet of material, approved by the district, and she told Williams that he was to choose his handouts only from that material. Vidmar said that if Williams deviated from her instructions, he could be fired. None of the material that Williams had been using was in the packet. "That was basically the last straw for us," says Joshua Carden, one of the A.D.F. attorneys working on the case. On November 22nd, Williams filed suit in federal court.

"Definitely work-related."

Williams's opponents acknowledge that the timing of the A.D.F.'s filing, on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday, was tactically brilliant. "My background is in public relations," says Nathalie Schuler Ferro, a Stevens Creek mother actively involved in the school's public defense. "You have forty-eight hours to respond to anything in a crisis. Well, they filed this thing the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and everybody's leaving, and you have already lost the P.R. campaign." The A.D.F.'s framing of the story—"Declaration of Independence Banned from Classroom"—shaped the news stories for several days. When the district finally did answer, pointing out that the Declaration had not been "banned," its public response was constrained by its lawyers. A group of parents, in close communication with the school, took up the defense in less muted tones. They set up a Web site, and, with Ferro acting as the unofficial spokesman, they have argued the school's case in the press and on blogs.

The parents' group supporting the school and Mrs. Vidmar has itself become a subject of dispute, with some parents believing that the group became too strident. Joanne Campbell attended some meetings of the group and joined its e-mail list. "But what I found was they were all bashing Mr. Williams and putting him down," she said.

Sarah Williams, Stephen's wife, took her husband's critics to task in a letter to the local paper, urging parents to use caution in spreading stories about her husband's supposed proselytizing. One story going around had Williams writing Bible verses on the blackboard—but it turned out to be passages from Maccabees, cited for a lesson on Hanukkah.

Some of the parents are motivated by a practical concern. Because of California's quirky formula for funding schools, the Cupertino district, despite its relative affluence, is among the lowest funded in the state. Last November, a local parcel tax that would have supported the schools was narrowly defeated, and some parents worry about the effect the Stevens Creek controversy will have on older voters, who tend to be skeptical about increases in school taxes. One such voter is Ralph Otte, a retired teacher and the school liaison for his chapter of the American Legion. Since the lawsuit, Otte has made it his business to visit the school, attend community meetings about the controversy, and read the fifth-grade history textbook. "What happened to the Creator?" Otte asks. "They've just written him off. I want my money to go for a better book than that."

Stephen Williams maintains that he never meant to cause such a controversy, and that "never in my wildest dreams did I think this would have the national media attention that it did." He continues to teach at Stevens Creek, though there are awkward moments. When school resumed after the Thanksgiving break, a staff meeting became a venting session directed at Williams. "There are a few people who will eat with him," Sarah Beetem says. "A lot of the staff will not. A lot of the staff will not talk to him, other than about specific school-related things. I think they still feel hurt and betrayed. I think everyone wishes he would go away." Even some who support Williams have expressed their dismay. Kim Item, who is one of Williams's class mothers, wrote him a three-page letter in which she lamented that the C. S. Lewis book "is one of the last Christian books left in the public school, and now is probably about to be removed." The morning after one particularly contentious community meeting, Item walked up to Williams, put her finger in his face, and said, "Mr. Williams, you have to stop. This is not your fight, this is God's fight. You're trying to play God, and it's got to stop!"

The incremental reopening of the schoolhouse door to religion brings up the very sorts of question being contested in Cupertino: When does teaching about religion become proselytizing? The state's "Guidelines for Teaching About Religion" says that a teacher can instruct about religion but can emphasize no particular religion. In attorney conferences before the suit, a district lawyer pointed out that Williams's disputed material all highlighted the role of the Christian faith in the nation's founding. To that, A.D.F.'s Josh Carden responded, "You're not going to find a lot of Muslim Founding Fathers."

Around Stevens Creek, the atmosphere remains charged, as Larry Woodard discovered when he returned home from work recently to find his wife and children visibly upset. The school had been locked down by police that afternoon as they searched the area. Two girls had reported seeing a man with a gun on the school grounds. "Nobody in our house has slept well since," Woodard says. The man turned out to be a parent who had come to pick up his child. The "gun" was a cell phone. ♦

FICTION

MEN OF IRELAND

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

The man came jauntily, the first of the foot passengers. Involuntarily he sniffed the air. My God! he said, not saying it aloud. My God, you can smell it, all right. He hadn't been in Ireland for twenty-three years.

He went more cautiously when he reached the edge of the dock, being the first, not knowing where to go. “On there,” an official looking after things said, gesturing over his shoulder with a raised thumb.

“O.K.,” the man said. “O.K.”

He went in this direction. The dock was different, not as he remembered it, and he wondered where the train came in. Not that he intended to take it, but it would give him his bearings. He could have asked the passengers who had come off the boat behind him but he was shy about that. He went more slowly and they began to pass him, some of them going in the same direction. Then he saw the train coming in. Dusty, it looked; beaten up a bit, but as much of it as he could see was free from graffiti.

He was a shabbily dressed man, everything he wore having been abandoned by someone else. He had acquired the garments over a period, knowing he intended to make this journey—the trousers of what had been a suit, brown pin-striped, worn shiny in the seat and at the knees, a jacket that had been navy blue and was nondescript now, the khaki shirt he wore an item once of military attire. His shoes were good, in one of his pockets was an Old Carthusian tie, although he had not himself attended Charterhouse. His name was Donal Prunty. Once big, heavily made, he seemed much less so now, the features of a face that had been florid at that time pinched within the sag of flesh. His dark hair was roughly cut. He was fifty-two years old.

The cars were coming off the boat now, beginning to wind their way around the new concrete buildings before passing through one of them—or so it seemed from where he stood. The road they were making for was what he wanted and he walked in that direction. Going over, the livestock lorry he'd been given a lift in had brought him nearly to the boat itself. Twenty-three years, he thought again. You'd never believe it.

He'd been on the road for seven days, across the breadth of England, through Wales. The clothes had held up well; he'd kept himself shaven as best he could, the blades saved up from what they allowed you in the hostels. You could use a blade thirty or so times if you wanted to, until it got jagged. You'd have to watch whatever you'd acquired for the feet, most of all you had to keep an eye on that department. His shoes were the pair he'd taken off the drunk who'd been lying on the street behind the Cavendish Hotel. Everything else you could take was gone from him—wallet, watch, studs and cufflinks, any loose change, a fountain pen if there'd been one, car keys in case the car would be around with things left in it. The tie had been taken off but thrown back and he had acquired it after he'd unlaced the shoes.

When he reached the road to Wexford the cars were on it already. Every minute or so, another one would go past, and the lorries were there, in more of a hurry. But neither car nor lorry stopped for him, and he walked a mile and then the greater part of another. Fewer cars passed him then, more travelling in the other direction, to catch the same boat going back to Fishguard. He caught up with a van parked in a lay-by, the driver eating crisps, a can of Pepsi-Cola on the dashboard in front of him, the window beside him wound down.

“Would you have a lift?” he asked him.

“Where're you heading?”

“Mullinavat, on the Waterford road.”

“I'm taking a rest.”

“I'm not in a hurry. God knows, I'm not.”

“I'd leave you to New Ross. Wait there till I'll have finished the grub.”

“D'you know beyond Mullinavat, over the Galloping Pass? A village by the name of Gleban?”

“I never heard of that.”

“There's a big white church out the road, nothing only petrol and a half-and-half in Gleban. A priests' seminary a half mile the other way.”

“I don't know that place at all.”

“I used be there one time. I don't know would it be bigger now.”

“It would surely. Isn't everywhere these times? Get in and we'll make it to Ross.”

Prunty considered if he'd ask the van driver for money. He could leave it until they were getting near Ross in case the van would be pulled up as soon as money was mentioned and he'd be told to get out. Or maybe it'd be better if he'd leave it until the van was drawn up at the turn to Mullinavat, where there'd be the parting of the ways. He remembered Ross, he remembered where the Mullinavat road was. What harm could it do, when he was as far as he could be taken, that he'd ask for the price of a slice of bread, the way any traveller would?

Prunty thought about that while the van driver told him his mother was in care in Tagoat. He went to Tagoat on a Sunday, he said, and Prunty knew what the day was then, not that it made a difference. In a city you'd always know that one day of the week when it came round, but travelling you wouldn't be bothered cluttering yourself with that type of thing.

“She's with a woman who's on the level with her,” the van driver said. “Not a home, nothing like that. I wouldn't touch a home.”

Prunty agreed that he was right. She'd been where she was a twelvemonth, the van driver said, undisturbed in a room, every meal cooked while she'd wait for it. He wagged his head in wonder at these conditions. “The Queen of Sheba,” he said.

Prunty's own mother was dead. She'd died eighteen months before he'd gone into exile, a day he hated remembering. Word came in at Cahill's, 1979, a wet winter day, February, he thought it was.

“You've only the one mother,” Prunty said. “I'm over for the same.”

He made the connection in the hope that such shared ground would assist in the matter of touching the van driver for a few coins.

“In England, are you?” the van driver inquired.

“Oh, I am. A long time there.”

“I was never there yet.”

“I'm after coming off the ferry.”

“You're travelling light.”

“I have other stuff at Gleban.”

“Is your mother in a home there?”

“I wouldn't touch one, like yourself. She's eighty-three years of age, and still abiding in the same house eight children was born in. Not a speck of dust in

DOROTHEA LANGE, “COUNTRY ROAD, IRELAND” (1954) / OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

it, not an egg fried you wouldn't offer up thanks for, two kinds of soda bread made every day."

The van driver said he got the picture. They passed the turn to Adamstown, the evening still fine, which Prunty was glad about. He had two children, the van driver said, who'd be able to tell him if Kilkenny won. Going down to Tagoat on a Sunday was the way of it when old age would be in charge, he said; you made the sacrifice. He crossed himself when they passed a church, and Prunty said to himself he'd nearly forgotten that.

"You'd go through Wexford itself in the old days," he said.

"You would, all right."

"The country's doing well."

"The Europeans give us the roads. Ah, but sure she's doing well all the same."

"Were you always in Ross?"

"Oh, I was."

"I cleared off when I had to. A while ago."

"A lot went then."

The van drew in when the conversation had been exhausted and there'd been silence for a few miles. They were in a quiet street, deserted on a Sunday evening. "Well, there you go."

"You couldn't see your way to a few bob?"

The van driver leaned across to release the catch of the door. He pushed the door open.

"Maybe a fifty if you'd have it handy," Prunty suggested, and the van driver said he never carried money with him in the van and Prunty knew it wasn't true. Reluctant to get out, he said, "Any loose change at all."

"I have to be getting on now. Take that left by the lamppost with the bin on it. D'you see it? Take it and keep going."

Prunty got out. He stood back while the door was banged shut from the inside. They said it because the mention of money made them think of being robbed. Even a young fellow like that, strong as a horse. Hold on to what you'd have: they were all like that.

He watched the van driving away, the orange direction light flicking on and off, the turn made to the right. He set off in the direction he'd been given and no car passed him until he left the town behind. None stopped for him then, the evening sun dazzling him on the open road. That was the first time he had begged in Ireland, he said to himself, and the thought stayed with him for a few miles, until he lay down at the edge of a field. The night would be fine except for the bit of dew that might come later on. It wasn't difficult to tell.

The old man was asleep, head slumped into his chest, its white hair mussed, one arm hanging loose. The doorbell hadn't roused him, and Miss Brehany's decision was that she had no option but to wake him since she had knocked twice and still he hadn't heard. "Father Meade," she called softly, while the man who had come waited in the hall. She should have sent him away; she should have said come some time Father Meade would know to expect him. After his lunch when the day was warm he usually dropped off. "Miss Brehany," he said, sitting up.

She described the man who had come to the door. She said she had asked for a name but that her inquiry had been passed by as if it hadn't been heard. When she'd asked again she hadn't understood the response. She watched the priest pushing himself to his feet, the palms of his hands pressed hard on the surface of his desk.

"He's wearing a collar and tie," she said.

"Would that be Johnny Healy?"

"It isn't, Father. It's a younger man than Johnny Healy."

"Bring him in, Rose, bring him in. And bring me in a glass of water, would you?"

"I would of course."

Father Meade didn't recognize the man who was brought to him, although he had known him once. He wasn't of the parish, he said to himself, unless he'd come into it in recent years. But his housekeeper was right about the collar and tie, an addition to a man's attire that in Father Meade's long experience of such matters placed a man. The rest of his clothing, Rose Brehany might have added, wasn't up to much.

"Would you remember me, Father? Would you remember Donal Prunty?"

Miss Brehany came in with the water and heard that asked and observed Father Meade's slow nod, after a pause. She was thanked for the glass of water.

"Are you Donal Prunty?" Father Meade asked.

"I served at the Mass for you, Father."

"You did, Donal, you did."

"It wasn't yourself who buried my mother."

"Father Loughlin if it wasn't myself. You went away, Donal."

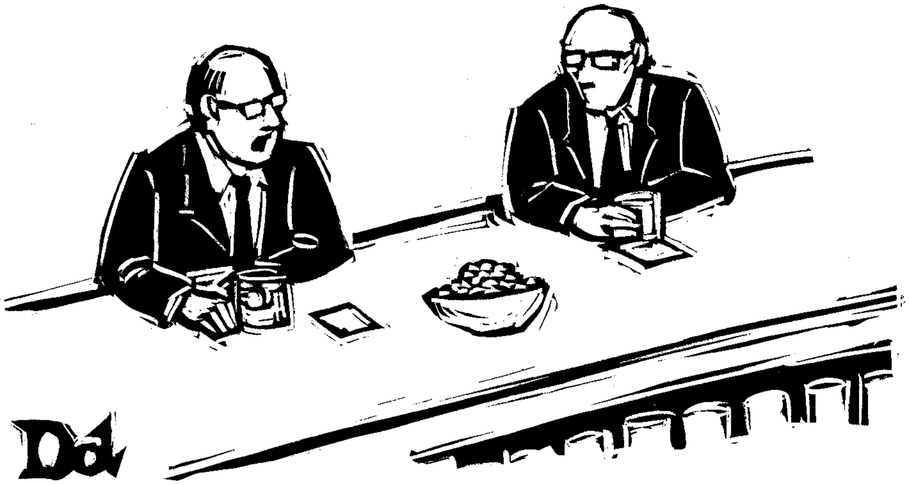
"I did, all right. I was never back till now."

He was begging. Father Meade knew, you always could; it was one of the senses that developed in a priest. Not that a lot came begging in a scattered parish, not like you'd get in the towns.

"Will we take a stroll in the garden, Donal?"

"Whatever would be right for you, Father. Whatever."

Father Meade unlatched the French doors and went ahead of his visitor. "I'm



"I'm hoping that someday I might be reunited with my biological hair."

fond of the garden," he said, not turning his head.

"I'm on the streets, Father."

"In Dublin, is it?"

"I went over to England, Father."

"I think I maybe heard."

"What work was there here, all the same?"

"Oh, I know, I know. Nineteen . . . what would it have been?"

"Nineteen eighty-one I went across."

"You had no luck there?"

"I never had luck, Father."

The old man walked slowly, the arthritis he was afflicted with in the small bones of both his feet a nuisance today.

The house in which he had lived since he'd left the presbytery was modest, but the garden was large, looked after by a man the parish paid for.

House and garden were parish property, kept for purposes such as this, where old priests—more than one at the same time if that happened to be how things were—would have a home. Father Meade was fortunate in having it to himself, Miss Brehany coming every day.

"Isn't it grand, that creeper?" He gestured across a strip of recently cut grass at Virginia creeper turning red on a high stone wall with broken glass in the cement at the top. Prunty had got into trouble. The recollection was vague at first, before more of it came back: something about stealing from farms at harvest time or the potato planting, when everyone would be in the fields. Always the same, except the time he was caught with the cancer charity box. As soon as his mother was buried he went off, and was in trouble again before he left the district a year or so later.

"The Michaelmas daisy is a flower that's a favorite of mine." Father Meade gestured again. "The way it cheers up the autumn."

"I know what you mean, all right, Father."

They walked in silence for a few minutes. Then Father Meade asked, "Are you back home to stop, Donal?"

"I don't know am I. Is there much doing in Gleban?"

"Ah, there is, there is. Well, look at it now, compared with when you took off. Sure, it's a metropolis nearly." Father Meade laughed, then more seriously added, "We've the John Deere agency, and the estate on the Mullinavat road and another beyond the church. We have the Super Valu and the Hardware Co-Op and the bank suboffice two days in the week. We have Dolan's garage and Linehan's drapery and general goods, and changes made in Steacy's. You'd go to Mullinavat for a doctor in the old days, even if you'd find one there. We have a young fellow coming out to us on a Tuesday for the last year and longer."

A couple of steps, contending with the slope of the garden, broke the path they were on. The chair on which Father Meade had earlier rested, catching the morning sun, was still there, on a lawn more spacious than the strip of grass by the wall with the Virginia creeper.

"Still and all, it's a good thing to come back to a place when you were born in it. I remember your mother."

"I'm wondering could you spare me something, Father."

Father Meade turned and began the walk back to the house. He nodded an indication that he had heard and noted the request, the impression given to Prunty that he was considering it. But in the room where he had earlier fallen asleep he said there was employment to be had in Gleban and its neighborhood.

"When you'll go down past Steacy's bar go in to Kingston's yard and tell Mr. Kingston I sent you. If Mr. Kingston hasn't something himself he'll put you right for somewhere else."

"What's Kingston's yard?"

"It's where they bottle the water from the springs up at the Pass."

"It wasn't work I came for, Father."

Prunty sat down. He took out a packet of cigarettes, and then stood up again to offer it to the priest. Father Meade was standing by the French doors. He came farther into the room and stood behind his desk, not wanting to sit down himself because it might be taken as an encouragement by his visitor to prolong his stay. He waved the cigarettes away.

"I wouldn't want to say it," Prunty said.

He was experiencing difficulty with his cigarette, failing to light it although he struck two matches, and Father Meade

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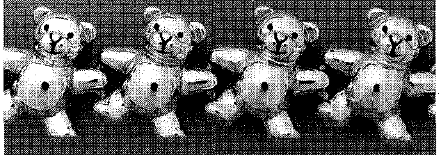

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wondered if there was something the matter with his hands the way he couldn't keep them steady. But Prunty said the matches were damp. You spent a night sleeping out and you got damp all over even though it didn't rain on you.

"What is it you don't want to say, Mr. Prunty?"

Prunty laughed. His teeth were discolored, almost black.

"Why're you calling me Mr. Prunty, Father?"

The priest managed a laugh, too. Put it down to age, he said: he sometimes forgot a name and then it would come back.

"Donal it is," Prunty said.

"Of course it is. What's it you want to say, Donal?"

A match flared, and at once there was a smell of tobacco smoke in a room where no one smoked anymore.

"Things happened the time I was a server, Father."

"It was a little later on you went astray, Donal."

"Have you a drink, Father? Would you offer me a drink?"

"We'll get Rose to bring us in a cup of tea."

Prunty shook his head, a slight motion, hardly a movement at all.

"I don't keep strong drink," Father Meade said. "I don't take it myself."

"You used give me a drink."

"Ah no, no. What's it you want, Donal?"

"I'd estimate it was money, Father. If there's a man left anywhere would see me right it's the Father. I used say that. We'd be down under the arches and you could hear the rain falling on the river. We'd have the brazier going until they'd come and quench it. All Ireland'd be there, Toomey'd say. Men from all over, and Nellie Bonzer, too, and Colleen from Tuam. The methylated doing the rounds and your fingers would be shivering and you opening up the butts, and you'd hear the old stories then. Many's the time I'd tell them how you'd hold your hand up when you were above in the pulpit. 'Don't go till I'll give it to you in Irish,' you'd say, and you'd begin again and the women would sit there obedient, not understanding a word but it wouldn't matter because they'd have heard it already in the foreign tongue. Wasn't there many a priest called it the foreign tongue, Father?"

"I'm sorry you've fallen on hard times, Donal."

"Eulala came over with a priest's infant inside her."

"Donal—"

"Eulala has a leg taken off of her. She has the crutches the entire time, seventy-one years of age. It was long ago she left Ireland behind her."

"Donal—"

"Don't mind me saying that about a priest."

"It's a bad thing to say, Donal."

"You used give me a drink. D'you remember that though? We'd sit down in the vestry when they'd all be gone. You'd look out the door to see was it all right and you'd close it and come over to me. 'Isn't it your birthday?' you'd say and it wouldn't be at all. 'Will we open the old bottle?' you'd say. The time it was holy wine, you sat down beside me and said it wasn't holy yet. 'No harm,' you said."

Father Meade shook his head. He blinked, and frowned, and for a moment Miss Brehany seemed to be saying there was a man at the front door, her voice coming to him while he was still asleep. But he wasn't asleep, although he wanted to be.

"Many's the time there'd be talk about the priests," Prunty said. " 'The hidden Ireland' is Toomey's word for the way it was in the old days. All that, Father. 'Close your eyes,' you used say in the vestry. 'Close your eyes, boy. Make your confession to me after.' "

There was a silence in the room. Then Father Meade asked why he was being told lies, since he of all people would know they were lies.

"I think you should go away now," he said.

"When I told my mother she said she'd have a whip taken to me."

"You told your mother nothing. There was nothing to tell anyone."

"Breda Flynn's who Eulala was, only a Romanian man called her that and she took it on. Limerick she came from. She was going with the Romanian. Toomey's a Carlow man."

"What you're implying is sickening and terrible and disgraceful. I'm telling you to go now."

Father Meade knew he said that, but hardly heard because he was wondering if he was being confused with another priest; a brain addled by recourse to methylated spirits would naturally be blurred by now. But the priests of the parish, going back for longer than the span of Prunty's lifetime, had been well known to Father Meade. Not one of them could he consider, even for a moment, in the role Prunty was hinting at. Not a word of what was coming out of this demented imagination had ever been heard in the parish, no finger ever pointed in the direction of any priest. He'd have known if there'd been abuse or anything like it; he'd have been told—of that Father Meade was certain, as sure of it as he was of his faith.

"I have no money for you, Prunty."

"Long ago I'd see the young priests from the seminary. Maybe there'd be three of them walking together, out on the road to the Pass. They'd always be talking and I'd think to myself maybe I'd enter the seminary myself. But then again you'd be cooped up. Would I come back tomorrow morning after you'd have a chance to get hold of a few shillings?"

"I have no money for you," Father Meade said again.

"There's talk no man would want to put about. You'd forget things, Father. Long ago things would happen and you'd forget them. Sure, no one's blaming you for that. Only one night I said to myself, 'I'll go back to Gleban.' "

"Do you know you're telling lies, Prunty? Are you aware of it? Evil's never forgotten, Prunty—of all people, a priest knows that. Little things fall away from an old man's mind, but what you're trying to put into it would never have left it."

"No harm's meant, Father."

"Tell your tale in Steacy's bar, Prunty, and maybe you'll be believed."

Father Meade stood up and took what coins there were from his trouser pockets and made a handful of them on the desk.

"Make your confession, Prunty. Do that at least."

Prunty stared at the money, counting it with his eyes. Then he scooped it up. "If we had a few notes to go with it," he said, "we'd have the sum done right."

He spoke slowly, as if unhurried

enunciation was easier for the elderly. It was all the talk, he said, the big money there'd be. No way you could miss the talk, no way it wouldn't affect you.

He knew he'd get more. Whatever was in the house he'd go away with, and he watched while a drawer was unlocked and opened, while money was taken from a cardboard box. None was left behind.

"Thanks, Father," he said before he went.

Father Meade opened the French doors in the hope that the cigarette smoke would blow away. He'd been a smoker himself, a thirty-a-day man, but that was long ago.

"I'm off now, Father," Miss Brehany said, coming in to say it, before she went home. She had cut cold meat for him, she said. She'd put the tea things out for him, beside the kettle.

"Thanks, Rose. Thanks."

She said goodbye and he put the chain on the hall door.

In the garden he pulled the chair he'd been sitting on earlier into the last of the sun and felt it warm on his face. He didn't blame himself for being angry, for becoming upset because he'd been repelled by what was said to him. He didn't blame Donal Prunty because you couldn't blame a hopeless case. In a long life a priest had many visits, heard voices that ages ago he'd forgotten, failed to recognize faces that had been as familiar as his own. "See can you reach him, Father," Donal Prunty's mother had pleaded when her son was still a child, and he had tried to. But Prunty had lied to him then, too, promising without meaning it that he'd reform himself. "Ah sure, I needed a bit of money," he said hardly a week later when he was caught with the cancer box broken open.

Was it because he clearly still needed it, Father Meade wondered, that he'd let him go away with every penny in the house? Was it because you couldn't but pity him? Or was there a desperation in the giving, as if it had been prompted by his own failure when he'd been asked, in greater desperation, to reach a boy who didn't know right from wrong?

While he rested in the sun, Father Meade was aware of a temptation to let his reflections settle for one of these conclusions. But he knew, even without further thought, that there was as little truth in them as there was in the crude pretenses of his visitor. There'd been no generous intent in the giving of the money, no honorable guilt had inspired the gesture, no charitable motive. He had paid for silence.

Guiltless, he was guilty, his brave defiance as much of a subterfuge as any of his visitor's. He might have belittled the petty offense that had occurred, so slight it was when you put it beside the betrayal of a Church and the shaming of Ireland's priesthood and the priesthood everywhere. He might have managed to say something decent to a Gleban man who was down and out in case it would bring consolation to the man, in case it would calm his conscience if maybe one day his conscience would nag. Instead, he had been fearful, diminished by the sins that so deeply stained his cloth, distrustful of his people.

Father Meade remained in his garden until the shadows that had lengthened on his grass and his flower beds were no longer there. The air turned cold. But he sat a little longer before he went back to the house to seek redemption and to pray for Donal Prunty.

Prunty walked through the town Gleban had become since he had lived in it. He didn't go to the church to make his confession, as he'd been advised. He didn't go into Steacy's bar, but passed both by, finding the way he had come in the early morning. He experienced no emotion, nor did it matter how the money had become his, only that it had. A single faint thought was that the town he left behind was again the place of his disgrace. He didn't care. He hadn't liked being in the town, he hadn't liked asking where the priest lived, nor going there. He hadn't liked walking in the garden or making his demand, or even knowing that he would receive what he had come for in spite of twice being told he wouldn't. He would drink a bit of the money away tonight and reach the ferry tomorrow. He wouldn't hurry after that. Whatever pace he went at, the streets where he belonged would still be there. ♦

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THE CRITICS

THE ART WORLD

LOOKING BACK

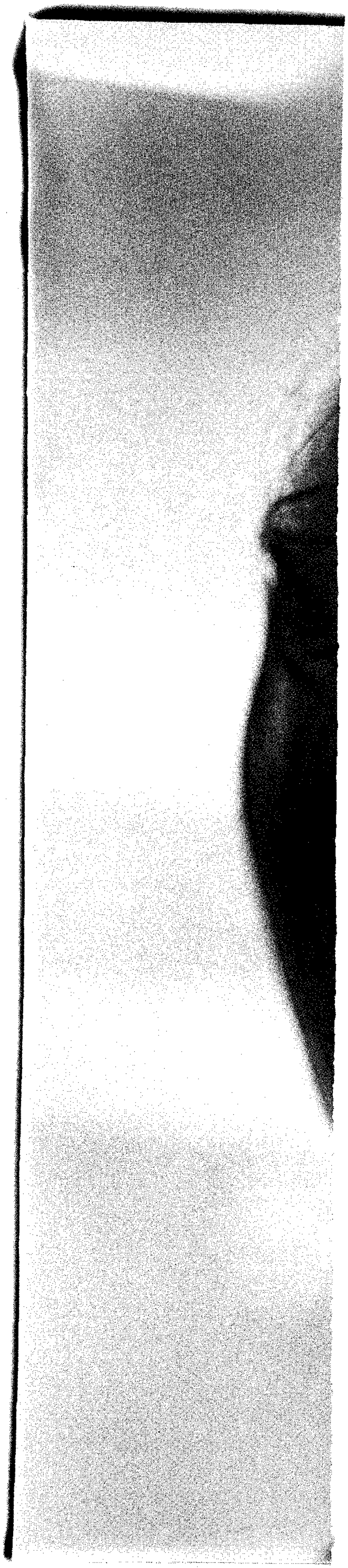
Diane Arbus at the Met.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The revolutionary photographer Diane Arbus, who died in 1971, at the age of forty-eight, said, "A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know." That's not quite right, on the evidence of "Diane Arbus: Revelations," an indeed revealing, though gratingly worshipful, retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum. Confronting a major photograph by Arbus, you lose your ability to know—or distinctly to think or feel, and certainly to judge—anything. She turned picture-making inside out. She didn't gaze at her subjects; she induced them to gaze at her. Selected for their powers of strangeness and confidence, they burst through the camera lens with a presence so intense that whatever attitude she or you or anyone might take toward them disintegrates. Arbus's fine-grained black-and-white film and minimalist form—usually a subject centered in a square format—act with the virtual instantaneity of punchy graphic design. The image starts to affect you before you are fully aware of looking at it. Its significance dawns on you with the leisureliness of shock, in the state of mind that occupies, for example, the moment—a foretaste of eternity—after you have slipped on an icy sidewalk and before you hit the ground. You may feel, crazily, that you have never really seen a photograph before. Nor is this impression of novelty evanescent. Over the years, Arbuses that I once found devastating have seemed to wait for me to change just a little, then to devastate me all over again. No other photographer has been more controversial. Her greatness, a fact of experience, remains imperfectly understood.

"Revelations" is on a triumphal tour: having appeared in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Houston, it's also scheduled for Essen, London, Barcelona, and Minneapolis. Prepared by curators working with Doon Arbus, the photographer's daughter and the firmly controlling administrator of her estate, it is really two shows: one of them presents the photographs, and the other is hagiography. There is valuable documentation, such as a contact sheet that shows that the subject of Arbus's famous, horrific picture of a boy clutching a toy hand grenade was actually a fairly normal-looking kid, with a talent for clowning. (Arbuses often amount to staged collaborations with their subjects; this is a matter not of falseness—she never said she was a documentarian—but of art.) And samples of her aphoristic prose beguile. Arbus could have been a fine writer, had she not ceded that worldly role to her adored brother, the poet Howard Nemerov. But the show's theatrical, moodily lighted installations of biographical materials—snapshots, letters, notebooks, cameras, books, keepsakes—strike me as creepy and pointless, except as fuel for the cult of a spicily neurotic woman who committed suicide. The phenomenon is familiar. Self-destroying

Opposite: "Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark, N.Y.C." (1965).



© ESTATE OF DIANE ARBUS

celebrities in our culture seem to waive their right to ordinary decencies, becoming fair game for anybody's poking and pawing. But the tendency, thus reinforced, to confuse Arbus with her work—a confusion shared and exploited by her critical detractors, most notably Susan Sontag—obscures her art's key personal quality: detachment under pressure, including the pressure of her own troubled emotions.

Arbus is important not for what she was but for her regular feat of vanishing, as a personality, when her camera clicked. T. S. Eliot's tenet of a necessary separation of "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" cannot be better exemplified than by Arbus at that recurrent moment when we as viewers are abandoned to visions overwhelmingly both fierce and tender. Imputations of "voyeurism" are absurd; voyeurs must feel safe, and Arbus's pictures are like the gaping barrels of loaded guns. Her personal background—sheltered, rebellious child of a cosmopolitan Jewish family; successful, dissatisfied fashion photographer; insecure, hungry spirit—explains much about her life, including her eccentric passion for the weird and the seedy. She was a thrill-seeking depressive fortunately not given to drink or drugs but excited, and made reckless, by prospects of rare and strong sensation. Both her genius and her compulsive adventuring, often sexual, took off in the nineteen-sixties—abetted by a collective taboo-breaking mania that, in retrospect, makes a pretty good case for taboos. (Arbus was far from the only bruised daredevil of that epoch to have crashed in the early seventies.) But her cynosure as an artist is a disciplined evacuation of psychic distance between her subjects and the viewer. Compared with Arbus's self-possessed, monumental dwarfs, transvestites, twins, carny folk, nudists, prodigious babies, aging dames, desperately bored suburbanites, and young people palpably facing long odds in life, even the most rigorous pictures by her particular artistic heroes—Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lisette Model—can seem sentimentally overburdened.

Sontag's notorious attack on Arbus, in an essay from 1973 that became the linchpin of her book "On Photography" (1977), passed one test of great criticism. It asked the right question—about photography's claim to be a full-fledged and legitimate art—at the right time, when Arbus's work had advanced that claim with unprecedented force. Otherwise, the essay is an exercise in aesthetic insensibility, eschewing description of the art for aspersions, often pithy, on the artist's ethics. "Arbus's interest in freaks expresses a desire to violate her own innocence," Sontag wrote. That's probably right, but it's incidental to photographs that transcend the interest and desire of their maker and, in the process, shatter the idea of "freaks" as a stable category of experience. Sontag rushed to rescue the idea. "In photographing dwarfs, you don't get majesty and beauty," she insisted. "You get dwarfs." She noted with bemusement that in Arbus's pictures people who are "pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive" look "cheerful, self-accepting, matter-of-fact." She wondered, "Do they know how grotesque they are? It seems as if they don't." They "appear not to know that they are ugly." It's an interesting complaint, suggesting that people who look or behave in unusual ways merit sympathy from the rest of us only if they visibly assent to our disgust with them. Saying such things shows how far Sontag was willing to go in a campaign that aimed, beyond Arbus, at photography itself. She denied it the power, which she granted to literature, of altering conventional responses—and even the possibility of being creatively inspired. She wrote, incredibly, "There is a large difference between the activity of a photographer, which is always willed, and the activity of a writer, which may not be."

In fact, Arbus's best pictures feel hardly more willed than "Kubla Khan." Of course, she knew how to put herself in the way of epiphanies. Photography is the art of anticipation, not working with memories but showing their formation. As such, it has relentlessly usurped imaginative and critical prerogatives of older, slower literature and handmade visual art. Sontag wasn't alone among critics in lamenting the growing hegemony of photography; the best of them all, Baudelaire, immediately saw in the daguerreotype—a "trivial image on a scrap of metal"—"a cheap method of disseminating a loathing for history and for painting among the people." (I take the quote from an appendix to "On Photography.") To admit that such mechanical, lumpen craft can attain the full consciousness, and self-consciousness, of great art ends the debate. Arbus brought about nothing less by fusing photography's documentary and expressive functions, and charging that synthesis with a conviction of reality so strong that it resembles myth. She remarked of a favorite subject, "There's a quality of legend about freaks. Like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle." She went on to say, "Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats." These words, making crystal clear Arbus's personal and intellectual attractions to oddities of nature and society, convey a responsiveness that is also a sense of responsibility. ◆

DOG WHISTLE

Up the road, a glittering army
marshals at the line; light turns,
and the blood between us tightens like a rope,
the anchor digs its heel.
Love is a jumper, going over like the water of a dam.

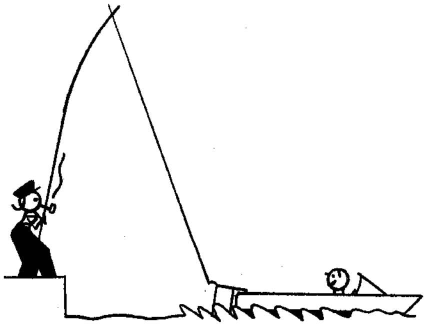
Killing off the lazy ones,
sending hot air rushing through the grates,
the city gets prepared. We have tape, a radio.
The newspaper keeps chaos just at bay.
Old people, full of feeling, inch away.

—*Dana Goodyear*

BRIEFLY NOTED

The White Rose, *by Jean Hanff Korelitz (Miramax; $24.95).* This novel transfers the plot of "Der Rosenkavalier" from Vienna to pre-millennial Manhattan. The Marschallin of the opera has become a professor at Columbia, married and nearing fifty, who is also the author of a best-selling book about an eighteenth-century courtesan. The Marschallin's lover, Octavian, is, in this version, a young florist. The precipitating event is her social-climbing cousin's announcement of his engagement to a graduate student in her department who is from an élite New York family. Things get more complicated when the florist, suitably armed with roses, falls for the same girl. The series of coincidental meetings and near-misses that ensues strains credulity more on the page than it does when sung. Still, Korelitz is alert both to New York's social geometry and to the melancholy that underlies the glittering surface of her model.

The Geographer's Library, *by Jon Fasman (Penguin Press; $24.95).* Fasman's début novel features one Paul Tomm, a reporter who, while poking around a quiet New England village on the obituary beat, stumbles upon clues to the demise of a local professor. He receives anonymous warnings to back off—most notably, a bloody molar pinned to his front door—but refuses to abandon his scoop. Alternating with the murder-mystery story line are cryptic chapters detailing the powers of the fifteen talismans of alchemy said to have been stolen, in 1154, from the Muslim cartographer, librarian, and mystic al-Idrisi. The gradual convergence of the two narratives is satisfying, but when, at the climax, Tomm beans an intruder with a baseball, bathos threatens. The novel is inventive and spirited but, like its protagonist, prematurely ambitious.



John Adams, *by James Grant (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $30).* At Adams's inauguration as our second President, onlookers wept, and Adams wondered whether it was "from the Loss of their beloved President, or from the Accession of an unbeloved one." Adams, the legal brains behind the Revolution, was, Grant writes, "ill-suited to elective politics." His fellow-patriots respected him, but James Madison averred that he was "distinguished for his unpopularity," and Alexander Hamilton charged him with "disgusting egotism" and "distempered jealousy." Grant is a financial writer, and his focus on Adams's career as a "junk-bond promoter," whose machinations in European capital markets kept the Revolution afloat, is illuminating, but it also results in a portrait that is somewhat bloodless. Grant doesn't quite rescue Adams from the traits that exposed him to ridicule in his own day: as Vice-President, he argued that he should be called "your Majesty."

Perfect Madness, *by Judith Warner (Riverhead; $23.95).* In this polemic about contemporary motherhood, Warner argues that the gains of feminism are no match for the frenzied perfectionism of American parenting. In the absence of any meaningful health, child-care, or educational provisions, martyrdom appears to be the only feasible model for successful maternity—with destructive consequences for both mothers and children. Comparing this situation with her experiences of child-rearing in France, Warner finds American "hyper-parenting"—pre-school violin and Ritalin on demand—"just plain crazy." The trouble is a culture that, though it places enormous private value on children, neglects them in the arena of public policy. She is concerned less with sexual politics than with the more pervasive effects of the "winner takes all" mentality, and makes an urgent case for more socially integrated parenthood.

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BOOKS

THE END OF THE WORLD

Interpreting the plague.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

The Black Death, the pandemic of bubonic plague that hit Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, is like a disaster movie: a menace stalks the land; cries go up in the streets; millions of people die, not including you and me. Therefore, like disaster movies, the Black Death is very popular. Its bibliography is long. A new title has now been added to the list, "The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time" (HarperCollins; $25.95), by the science writer John Kelly.

The Black Death seems to have originated in Asia, probably on or near the Central Asian steppe, home to large rodent populations carrying the plague bacillus. In the early decades of the fourteenth century, Asia reportedly suffered a series of ecological upheavals—storms, floods, earthquakes—and these disturbances may have forced the rodents out of their holes and into contact with human beings. In any case, a mysterious illness swept through Asia in those years, and eventually it reached Crimea. On the eastern coast of Crimea, there was a city, Caffa (today, Feodosiya), that was an important trading hub, with a large community of Genoese merchants dispatching silks, sturgeon, timber, fur, and slaves from east to west. In the early thirteen-forties, Caffa was attacked by Mongols, and the conflict dragged on until, in 1347, it took an unexpected turn: the Mongol soldiers started sickening and dying. Their general, Khan Janibeg, ordered his men's corpses to be flung over the walls of Caffa, in the hope that they would infect the city. The plan apparently worked. The people of Caffa began to fall ill, at which point a number of the Genoese decided, "Let's get out of here," and ran for their ships. Belowdecks, Kelly writes darkly, "hundreds of plague-bearing rats were scratching themselves and sniffing at the cool sea air."

In those days, it was the practice of trading vessels to stick close to the coast, and to dock every three or four days. The ships from Caffa most likely did so, thereby delivering bubonic plague to port after port along the Black Sea. From those places, it seems, the plague swung inward, by land, and outward, as other ships set off. Soon, to the west, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania were stricken; to the south, Egypt and the Levant. In October of 1347, twelve ships, whether from Caffa or (probably) elsewhere, arrived in the Sicilian port of Messina. Shortly afterward, many people in the city came down with fevers and began to spit blood. The Messinese expelled the ships. Other port cities, once they got the news, turned back arriving vessels; the townspeople shot flaming arrows at them. But the boats found harbors eventually. The Black Death had entered Europe.

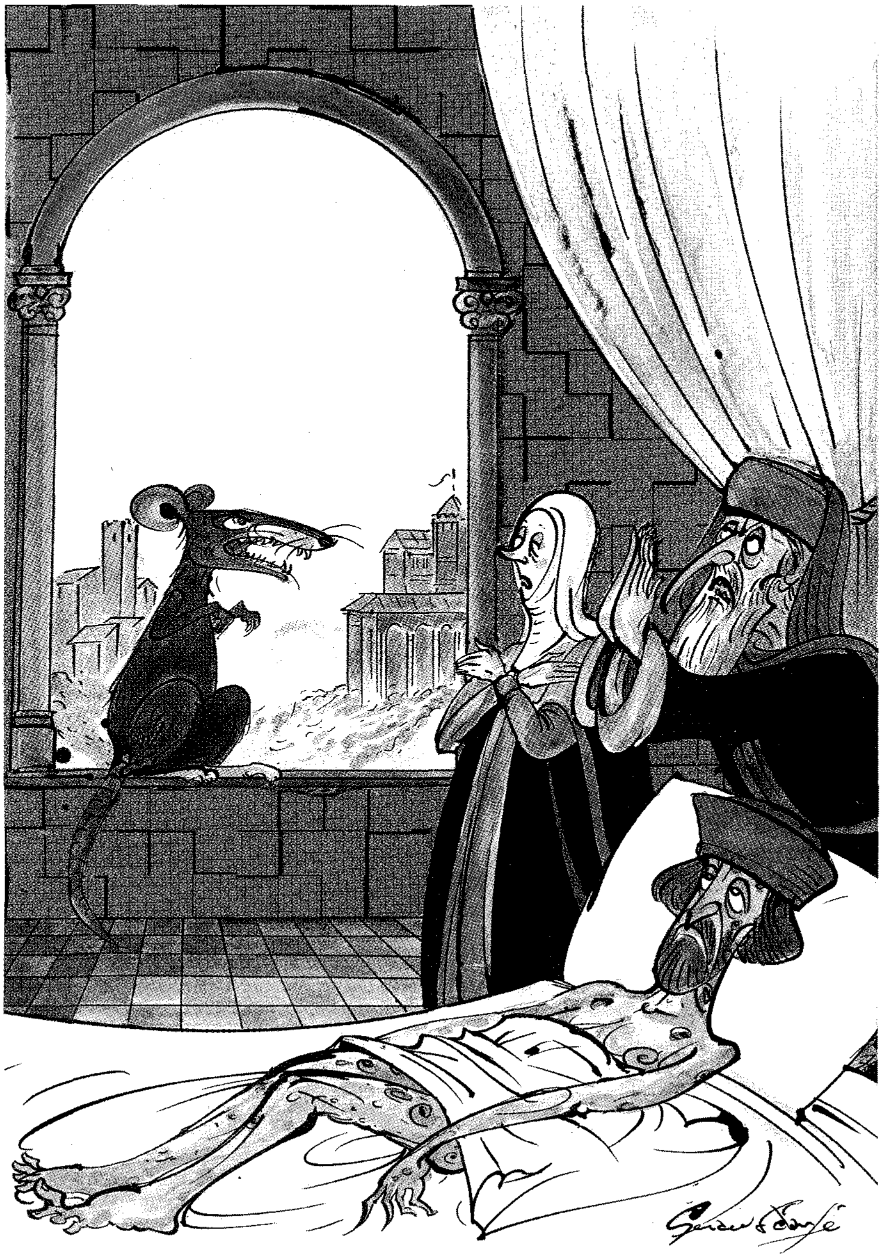
It now moved through Italy, France, and Spain. By 1348, it had jumped to England. Also in that year, it crossed the Alps, and began its sweep through Germany, Austria, and Hungary. (In some places, it moved as fast as two and a half miles a day.) By 1349, it had reached Scandinavia. From there, one front hit the ice walls of Greenland and came to a stop. Another circled back to Russia, north of Caffa. "Having closed the noose," Kelly writes, "the hangman rested." In four years, the plague had killed at least a third of the population of Europe: twenty-five million people. In the words of the medievalist Norman Cantor, "Nothing like this has happened before or since in the recorded history of mankind." Measured against Europe's population today, the Black Death took the equivalent of almost two billion lives.

The source of bubonic plague is the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*, named for a French bacteriologist, Alexandre Yersin, who identified it during a later outbreak, in China and India, in the eighteen-nineties. *Y. pestis's* primary carrier is the flea *Xenopsylla cheopis*, one of whose common habitats, in turn, is the fur on the back of *Rattus rattus*, the black rat, an animal common to the Central Asian steppe. The black rat was not new to Europe in the fourteenth century—it seems to have arrived there, via trade, before the birth of Christ—nor was *X. cheopis* the only "plague vector." The bacillus, specialists now think, probably jumped to *Pulex irritans*, the flea that makes its home on human flesh. Medieval people, who regarded bathing as dangerous to their health, were typically covered with *P. irritans*.

According to modern accounts (medieval reports sometimes say otherwise), bubonic plague has a course of three stages. First, the person shows flulike symptoms, including a high fever. In the second stage comes the symptom for which the disease is named: buboes, or dark, suppurating lumps (in fact, swollen lymph nodes), usually in the area of the neck, armpits, or groin. In the third stage, the organs fail. Untreated by appropriate antibiotics, which were not introduced until the nineteen-forties, bubonic plague kills three out of five of its victims within two weeks. If the disease goes straight to the lungs—a variation known as pneumonic plague—the course is shorter and nastier.

Ironically, the plague is associated with prosperity. As long as a region remains undeveloped, with low populations, small towns, heavy forests, and little trade, its local rats will remain in their holes and die quietly of the plague without passing it to human beings. During the Dark Ages, Europe was poor and quiet in that way, and, to our knowledge, the plague was nonexistent. But, around the end of the first millennium, Europe, as part of a normal climatic cycle, began to warm up. Across the continent, the temperature increased by an average of more than one degree Celsius. This change, known as the Little Optimum, plumped up harvests and hence the population. Between 1000 and 1250, the number of Europeans more than doubled, and they set about creating what we now call the high Middle Ages. Cities bloomed; universities were founded; Gothic cathedrals rose; vernacular literatures took root; trade exploded. Meanwhile, peace reigned. For most of the thirteenth century, there were no major wars in Europe.

Then this golden age ended. The



In four years, the Black Death killed at least a third of the population of Europe.

plague is related not just to prosperity but to prosperity followed by hardship, and in the early fourteenth century the hardship came. The Little Optimum reversed. In 1315 and 1316, the sun barely showed its face. And now everything that the Europeans had built up in the preceding centuries turned against them. Their expanded population began starving. (People ate cats and dogs; according to some reports, they ate one another.) Their far-flung trade brought them more rats. Their fine cities ran with filth, on which the rodents battened. Those individuals who didn't die of hunger had a good chance of dying in war, which erupted up and down the continent in the fourteenth century. By the thirteen-forties, the Europeans were weakened and discouraged, and at that moment the Black Death descended on them.

From city to city, the stories are much the same. The cart would come along the street in the morning, with the driver yelling, "Bring down your dead!" Very soon, the cemeteries were filled, and new ground had to be consecrated: "plague pits," where the corpses were laid on top of one another, often in stacks of five—"like lasagne," as one Italian scholar put it. In Avignon, when there was no land left for burial purposes, the Pope consecrated the Rhône, and the dead were pitched into the river. Family morals suffered. In the words of Boccaccio's "Decameron," which opens in Florence during the Black Death, "Brother abandoned brother. . . . Fathers and mothers refused to see and tend their children." Universities shut down; shops closed; mills stopped turning. In the countryside, farmhouse doors banged in the wind. At first, priests rushed to and fro, hearing last confessions. But the priests, too, began dying—possibly at a higher than average rate, because of their frequent exposure to the sick—and so, in certain dioceses, laypeople were given the authority to administer the last rites. In 1349, an Irish monk, describing these matters, wrote that he was leaving his record "in case anyone should still be alive in the future." It seemed like the end of the world.

There was no effective treatment for the disease. Medieval medicine was basically a mixture of the ancient "four humors" theory and the astrological formulations of the Arabic physicians of the end of the first millennium. According to the Arab treatises, certain planetary alignments could foster illness by creating miasmas, or clouds of noxious air. In the judgment of many of the fourteenth century's best minds, that was the cause of the Black Death. Some cities took public-health measures—mainly, quarantines. People were advised to avoid pore-opening activities (bathing, exercise, sex), so as to prevent the miasma from penetrating their skin.

The historian Richard J. Evans has written that in a pandemic people generally do two things: flee to supposedly uninfected areas, above all the countryside, and blame the contagion on strangers or on unpopular minority groups. Many Europeans did leave their cities. As for scapegoating, the primary object was the Jews. The pogroms seem to have begun in southern France in 1348 and then swept north. A turning point came in the fall of that year, in the Swiss town of Chillon, when a Jewish surgeon named Balavigny stated, under torture, that the Jews were causing the pestilence, by poisoning wells. (Indeed, Balavigny took his inquisitors to a well he had supposedly infected, and even showed them a rag in which, he said, he had carried the potion.) From this confession and others, a detailed conspiracy theory grew. The well poisonings were part of an international plot; its mastermind was a Spanish rabbi named Jacob; its goal was domination of the world by Jews. By late 1348, Jews were being slaughtered wholesale, particularly in Switzerland and the Rhineland. In Strasbourg, according to one chronicler, "They were led to their own cemetery into a house prepared for their burning and on the way they were stripped almost naked by the crowd which ripped off their clothes and found much money that had been concealed." Some Jews killed themselves and their children before the mob could get them. Kelly supports the theory, common to many explanations of anti-Semitism, that the basis was not just paranoid but economic. Many Jews were moneylenders; many Christians owed them money. The pogroms cancelled the debts.

As this summary suggests, Kelly's book contains a lot of interesting information. From the look of his notes, he got most of it from other modern histories of the Black Death, but there's nothing wrong with retelling. There is, however, something wrong with Kelly's narrative plan, which, in much of the book, is to go region by region, city by city. For some municipalities, there is little information; for others, the facts are the same as elsewhere. So Kelly is forced to pad. Sometimes he fictionalizes. In the case of Siena, for example, his primary source is what appears to be a short, tight-lipped journal by one Agnolo di Tura. Kelly doesn't know Agnolo's profession, but he knows his wife's name, Nicoluccia, and his mother's name, Donna Geppo. He also knows that Agnolo had five children, and for Kelly that's information enough:

> The door flies open to the di Tura family's life—to the Christmas visits of Donna Geppo's, the Sunday outings at the Campo, the evening walks through the little squares that blink out from Siena's converging streets like an eye to a keyhole: the five di Tura boys running across the square, scattering a flock of birds into a vermilion-colored sky, an out-of-breath Agnolo chasing after them, and Nicoluccia shouting for everyone to stop, especially Agnolo, who is too *grasso* to run.

As for what happened to these fat, happy Italians when the plague hit town, need I say?

Elsewhere, instead of making up stories, Kelly will bring in any juicy anecdote he can scrape up from the years surrounding the plague. The history of Cola di Rienzo, the buffoonish demagogue who took over Rome briefly in 1347; the celebrity trial of Queen Joanna of Naples and Sicily, a blond bombshell who was tried in Avignon in 1348 on the charge that she had had her husband murdered—we get pages and pages on both of them, and find out what everyone wore. Much of this has little or nothing to do with the plague. Never mind. Kelly is trying to give us a good time. His prose follows the same imperative. A continent-wide epidemic that killed twenty-five million people, not without first covering them in suppurating lumps: this, you might think, is a subject that requires no linguistic magnification. Kelly doesn't agree. The plague strides, it dances, it howls, it bites. Twice in three pages, it slithers. At one point, it launches "an all-points attack."

The writing, once you get used to it, can be a pleasant sort of pig wallow. But anyone buying this book should also pick up Norman Cantor's 2001 "In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World It Made" (Perennial; $13.95). Cantor, who died last fall, was a longtime professor at New York University, and probably the most widely read medievalist of the late twentieth century. His 1963 book "The Civilization of the Middle Ages" (revised in 1994) is the standard history of the period. By the time he wrote "In the Wake of the Plague," he had retired, and if I am not mistaken he was weary of scholarship, of footnotes, of anything he didn't want to do, which, in "The Wake," included giving a comprehensive description of the Black Death. Instead, he just wanted to talk. He's a very engaging talker, and he, too, tells us about the scandals and the clothes. But, as the title of his book announces, what he mostly wants to talk about is the consequences of the plague—the large changes it wrought in politics, in economics, in intellectual and religious life—and he makes these as interesting as the scandals.

What happens, Cantor asks, when one-third of the people in your world suddenly drop dead? A labor shortage, for one thing. The peasants of post-plague Europe found themselves in a good bargaining position, and they drove up wages. British landowners turned to Parliament, Parliament imposed controls, and this eventually set off the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Cantor's description of the end of the revolt is a nice example of his terse and ironic style. A mob had assembled outside the Tower of London: "The young King Richard II came riding out to meet the peasants. He assured them that he loved them and if they would go home their demands would be met and justice fulfilled. . . . The peasants dispersed and the power of the government, using the instrument of class-biased common law, came down on them hard." Most of their leaders were hanged. The momentum couldn't be stopped, however. Many laborers won better pay, and were able to buy up land. The middle class, rising before, rose faster.

Weirdly, Cantor's most enthralling chapter has to do with property law. The fortunes of fourteenth-century middle-class families depended entirely on whom their children married, what further children (preferably sons) those children bore, and who inherited what. Every gentry estate was an intricate construction of property calculations—on which, as Cantor puts it, the Black Death "fell like a tornado." Many families were left with no male head other than a teen-ager, or a child. Outside the doors, the peasants were demanding more money. Inside the doors, quite possibly, were grandfather's widow and father's widow, each with a "dower," or legal arrangement granting her, until her death, one-third of the estate's income—an income now halved, or worse. Such situations gave rise to bitter family fights and hence to an explosion of litigation, during which much of our current property law was hammered out. ("A barrister of 1350 deep frozen and thawed out today," Cantor writes, "would need only a six-month refresher course at a first-rate American law school to practice property or real estate law.") In the course of their quarrels, the gentry and the nobility put aside old codes of civility, and that development, together with certain very striking national events—notably the ouster and probable murder of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke, at the end of the century—created what Cantor calls a "new dark age of bad behavior." The modern conviction "that unrestrained greed is good" was born. The new property legislation controlled it but also fostered it, by encouraging people to do whatever the law would let them get away with.

Cantor's masterpiece of nuance is his discussion of the Jews. Kelly's chapter on the pogroms is a scream in the night; Cantor's is a complicated drama. Cantor tells us about the potentates—Pope

Clement VI; Queen Joanna of Naples, she of the murder trial—who shielded the Jews. (Kelly does, too, but more briefly.) He describes the lesser folk—the mayors, the magistrates—who held back the mobs. In Cologne, the town councilmen forbade the persecutions even after a Jew was brought to them, in chains, and told them he had poisoned wells. But then the archbishop of Cologne, who had helped to keep the mobs out of the city, died, and the balance tipped.

Cantor has his doubts about the cancellation-of-debts theory. He says that people indebted to Jewish lenders were not necessarily eager to get rid of them. Where else were they going to borrow money? Furthermore, Jewish lenders could be heavily taxed, "in return for protection." So it was not just out of humanitarianism but also for practical reasons that many people in positions of power held out. But then they got worn down, or were removed from office. Or they found themselves in a financial crunch, and the property of dead Jews was worth more to them than the loan services of live Jews. It is a human story.

Throughout the book, actually, Cantor is at his best when writing about human psychology, especially as its medieval contours differed from ours. Here he is on the nobility:

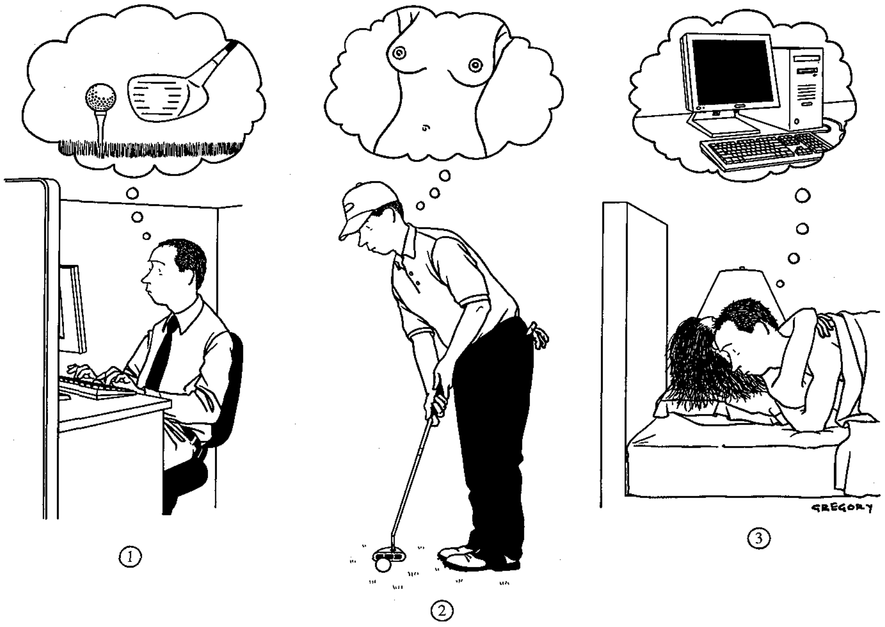
> They were tactile, existential personages, not reflecting on long-range or even tomorrow's significations. They were born to immeasurable wealth and great station; they behaved accordingly, in that way no different psychologically from the peasants who numbly pushed plows and existed on porridge. You played the hand you were dealt, the life to which Christ had called you, and then it was over, frequently in childhood or adolescence, almost never after the age of fifty.

This fatalism, which should make their extermination less poignant, only makes it more so.

The weakest part of Cantor's book is his roundup, at the end, of the various theories of the Black Death that have accumulated over the years. Cantor was a famously argumentative man, and at times it seems as though his main criterion in judging a theory were its popularity. If it's unpopular, he likes it. In 1979, the astrophysicist Fred Hoyle and the mathematician Chandra Wickramasinghe published a book arguing that the organic matter from which the Black Death (and human life) developed came from outer space, via comets—a proposal that Cantor says was ignored by most historians. He thinks it makes some sense, and he points out that in the nineteen-eighties the Nobel laureate Francis Crick made a related argument. Cantor also looks kindly on the idea, advanced in 1984 by the zoologist Graham Twigg, that the cause of the Black Death was not the rat-disease bubonic plague, imported from Asia, but the cattle-disease anthrax, contracted from Europe's own herds. Most experts reject Twigg's argument. Cantor accepts it, halfway. He believes that the Black Death involved both bubonic plague and anthrax, simultaneously.

Better regarded theories get a shorter hearing. Cantor has little faith in the famous notion, put forth by Millard Meiss in 1951, that the plague caused the painters of the late fourteenth century to abandon the new naturalism of Giotto and to retreat into the more abstract style that preceded it. Cantor is also not fond of the theory of his great predecessor Johan Huizinga that the Black Death fostered a new morbidity in late-medieval painting. (He suggests that the Europeans became death-minded before the plague, during the famine and other troubles that preceded it.) Finally, there is the idea, advanced in the mid-eighties by the historian David Herlihy, that the Black Death, by clearing away the old and making way for the new, ushered in the Renaissance. Kelly endorses this wholeheartedly. After the pestilence, he says, "Human ingenuity flowered. . . . Europe emerged cleansed and renewed—like the sun after rain." Cantor ponders Herlihy's theory but concludes that, even if the pestilence had some tangential effect, this "scarcely diminishes what we know to have been the main driving forces in Italian Renaissance culture—a very rich and politically powerful high bourgeoisie trying to establish its own identity . . . by recalling and identifying with the frame of mind, taste, and behavioral patterns of the ruling class of ancient Rome."

As Cantor points out, the plague is not extinct. Just last month, there was an outbreak of pneumonic plague in a diamond mine in northern Congo. A hundred and fourteen people were infected; almost half of them died. Even in the United States, there are about a dozen cases of bubonic plague per year, usually as a result of contact with rodents, just as in the fourteenth century. (In 1995, a woman in California came down with the plague after she ran over a squirrel with her power mower.) The plague is not our only worry, however. Throughout the last two decades, there have been articles in the press on the growing threat of worldwide epidemics, whether from bioterrorism or just from globalization and immigration. Both Kelly and Cantor share that anxiety—their books may have been born of it—and each, in his own way, makes the prospect seem more grim. ♦



POP MUSIC

TRUE GRIME

A genre's magic moment.

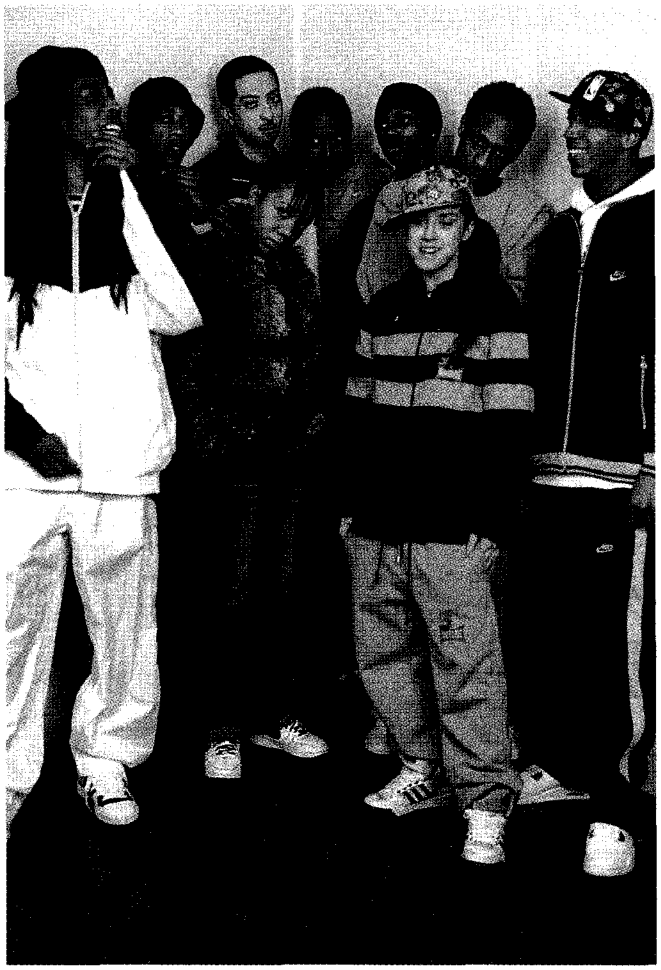
BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Pop-music purists invariably tell the same story about their favorite music. Whatever the genre—R. & B., classic punk, dance-hall reggae, Celtic lullabies—a purist will say that it was better at its inception, when the sound was an expression of something local and unique, before the terrible money came, and strangers corrupted the music with their embrace.

The purists are not entirely wrong. When a new sound sprouts on pop's tree, invisible to passersby, it is a wondrous thing. But what happens next is often more interesting: the music begins to find an audience, record companies offer to pay musicians to make their sounds, and someone gives those sounds a name. The music is now a genre, and it grows willy-nilly, borrowing from other genres, which it may eventually resemble, while announcing itself as something you've never heard before.

Electronica and crunk passed through this stage not long ago, and grime, a British genre, has now entered it. Grime emerged from the rave culture of the late nineteen-nineties, and will sound to most Americans like hip-hop performed by m.c.s with English accents and really fast raps. Hip-hop, even at its harshest, is dance music. By contrast, grime sounds as if it had been made for a boxing gym, one where the fighters have a lot of punching to do but not much room to move.

In the past three years, grime producers (who make the beats that m.c.s rhyme over) have developed a fierce, antic sound by distilling the polyrhythms of drum and bass or garage—the music of choice at many raves—to a minimal style sometimes consisting of nothing more than a queasy bass line and a single, clipped video-game squawk. Today, the music's choppy, off-center rhythms are blanketing London. Some tracks are beginning to show the influence of American hip-hop genres like crunk, but the m.c.s' cadences are unmistakably black and British, indebted to Jamaican dance-hall music and West Indian patois.



New music from London. Photograph by Anton Corbijn.

Grime exists largely in an informal economy. Some artists make their débuts on homemade DVDs, which feature shaky footage of competitions between m.c.s—a little like spelling bees, but louder. Some of the most popular battles are filmed in a long, narrow basement in Leytonstone, at the home of Jammer, a producer who runs Jahmek the World, a respected independent label. The DVDs, with names like "Lord of the Mics" and "Eskimo Dance," are sold in barbershops and record stores around London; pirate radio stations like Raw UK and Rinse FM broadcast tracks made days earlier; and, on cable, Channel U plays videos, including crude productions shot with handheld digital video cameras.

The grime artist Americans know best is Dizzee Rascal, a twenty-year-old from Bow, a working-class neighborhood in East London, where many grime artists live. Dizzee and his mentor, Wiley, who created one of the first grime tracks, "Eskimo," have both released albums in the United States in the past year. And both appear on "Run the Road," a new compilation that documents the genre's industry and energy.

"Destruction VIP," the most hopped-up track on the album, was produced by Jammer. It begins with a sample from what could be the soundtrack to a chase scene from a nineteen-sixties British police caper. Then Wiley leaps in, chattering taunts at his imitators: "I know hungry—he said he don't know you. I know who's who, and who's who don't know you." The music Ping-Pongs between half time and a faster tempo, segueing into the next verse, which is performed by Kano, a young m.c. who enunciates calmly over the aggressive beat. The song—essentially a succession of boasts and threats to rivals—is a cab ride over piles of rebar, but Kano never spills his drink.

There isn't a bad song on "Run the Road," and several m.c.s—all still in their teens—stand out: Kano; Louise Harman, who goes by the name Lady Sovereign; and Ears, who is only seventeen but is apparently already feeling old. In the opening of a nostalgic song called "Happy Dayz," he sings, "Do you remember that? Back in the days, when man was just bare happy? No worries, nothing to worry about? Those days were live, I miss them days, man." When the world turns this fast, middle age comes early.

Kano, who has been releasing songs since he was sixteen, is featured on four of the sixteen tracks on "Run the Road." Americans who are put off by British accents and grime slang like "nekkle" (great, very cool) and "bare" (lots of, many) will warm to Kano. His delivery on the song "P's and Q's," a comically fastidious call to arms, is so composed that it is almost polite, even when he's rhyming in double time: "This year's gotta be mine, I'm the first in line. Wow, you got your first rewind, but the second line sounded like the first line. I ain't got punch lines, I've got kick lines, and they ain't commercial, but I've got hit lines."

Lady Sovereign is not grime's only female m.c.; others include Lady Fury, the brilliant No Lay, and an up-and-coming producer called Mizz Beats. But she is the scene's sole white woman, and she seems destined to be its biggest success. The United States has yet to produce a universally accepted white female rapper, and there's already a debate over Sovereign's authenticity, even though she grew up in the same kind of public-housing project—Chalk Hill estate, now demolished—that many grime artists did. Besides, she's good: pithy, clever, and able to use her honking voice to humorous effect, much like Eminem, to whom she has already been compared. There's a hyperactive track on "Run the Road" called "Cha Ching (Cheque 1, 2 Remix)," which features as much hooting as rhyming, and nicely showcases her eccentric talent.

When I visited Sovereign in October, she and her producer, a man named Gabriel who goes professionally by Medasyn, were bunkered in a converted textile factory in East London, an appropriately filthy building where Medasyn rents studio space. Sovereign was curled up in an armchair, looking smaller and younger than eighteen. To her displeasure, people often point out that she looks like Sporty Spice, of the Spice Girls. Her hair was held up in a topknot and she wore a tracksuit. She spoke in a quiet, nasal voice, with the hedged courage of a teen-ager determined to take on the world every time she walks out the door.

After a few minutes of polite chat, she summed herself up: "I'm cheeky. I don't tell stories and moan about." Last July, she was signed by Island Records, a major label, but she still posts photographs of herself on Internet bulletin boards. (Medasyn told me that after Paris Hilton's cell phone got hacked Sovereign "was one of the first people to get the numbers. She even phoned Christina Aguilera.")

The day I stopped by, Sovereign and Medasyn played "Random" for me, a work-in-progress that captured grime's most irrational, fractal qualities: a pair of palsied bass notes here, a fibrillating shaker noise there, and a wobbly melody line that didn't sound entirely well. Sovereign began the song by quoting "Tipsy," an American hip-hop hit, and coursed through a series of seemingly unrelated ideas: "I can't see straight like I got one eye. Ooh (pop!). Your bottle's open, oh my. Let's get it started, move your arms around like fucked-up karate. . . . J. Lo's got a body, you can't see mine 'cause I wear my trousers baggy."

When the song was over, Sovereign asked me if I thought grime would take off in America. Five months later, the answer is increasingly clear. "Pow," a song by an m.c. called Lethal B, and grime's biggest hit to date, has made its way to New York, where it is currently being played on Hot 97 by the influential d.j. Funkmaster Flex. The American m.c.s Stat Quo and Pitbull have already recorded new verses for the track.

This week, Lady Sovereign's "Random" will be formally released as a single in London. The song was ultimately completed by a pair of producers called Menta, who gave Sovereign's charming non sequiturs a danceable makeover. This version of "Random" combines grime's squeaky bullets of noise with hip-hop's more forgiving swing. Sovereign might see the song's transformation as an auspicious portent. Grime is becoming familiar, a fine black mist dissolving in the air around us. ♦

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THE THEATRE

SOLOS AND SOLITARIES

Telling it like it was and wasn't.

BY JOHN LAHR

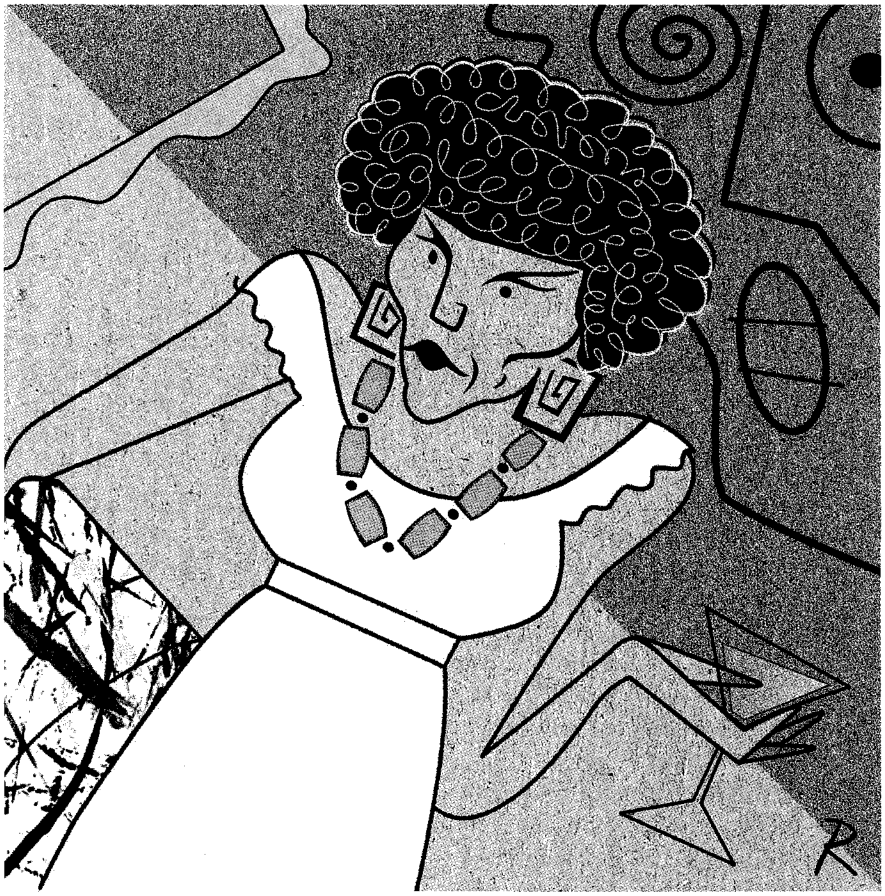
The secret to performance, Charlie Chaplin once quipped, is "entrances and exits." This issue bedevils the one-person show—a genre that is, for obvious commercial reasons, attractive to producers and, for obvious dramaturgical reasons, problematic for audiences. Why is this character in front of us? What has compelled him or her to step onto the stage? The character must somehow bring news—both of society and of the self. But if everything is narrated what is dramatized?

"Woman Before a Glass" (directed by Casey Childs, at the Promenade) is a one-woman show about the expatriate art patron and mistress of modernism Peggy Guggenheim. Guggenheim seems to have had two abiding addictions: painting and penises. Although she didn't have "the fortune of a face," she had the fortune of, well, a fortune, which gave her enormous sex appeal, and she devoted her life to making a spectacle of her power. When the conductor Thomas Schippers asked her how many husbands she'd had, "Mrs. Guggenheim," as she was known, shot back, "D'you mean my own, or other people's?" Rumor had it that Guggenheim had slept with more than a thousand men; she certainly bedded, among others, Samuel Beckett, Yves Tanguy, Roland Penrose, and Max Ernst, to whom she was briefly married. And of all the isms she embraced—Surrealism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism—the most defining ism was sadomasochism. She wrote, for instance, of her tempestuous first marriage, to the writer Laurence Vail, "When our fights worked up to a grand finale he would rub jam in my hair. But what I hated most was being knocked down in the streets."

Faced with such a welter of biographical possibility, the playwright Lanie Robertson seems as confused about how to approach his subject as he is about what to call his play, which is coyly subtitled "A Triptych in Four Parts." Instead of choosing where on his canvas to place the first stroke, Robertson simply drops the brush. In the manner of Jackson Pollock, whom Guggenheim famously launched, Robertson dribbles words everywhere. The show opens as a TV crew is filming Guggenheim at her villa in Venice. From the first ingratiating beat—Guggenheim appears, with a cigarette dangling from her lips and a glaring stain on her Fortuny gown, badmouthing her maid for having chosen this day to go on vacation—the play makes it clear that this is a diva watch, not a drama. As played by Mercedes Ruehl, Guggenheim, whom the Venetians called "the last duchess," is a grande dame in Dame Edna bat glasses. Ruehl is a powerful, sexual woman of a certain age, whose nervy, wisecracking energy turns Guggenheim's domineering self-absorption into a form of congeniality.

Although the script documents Guggenheim's voracity, it never attempts to examine, or even to imply, the emptiness that her manic intellectual and emotional gourmandizing tried to fill. Apart from a couple of sour asides about Guggenheim's mother, "Woman Before a Glass" makes no reference to its heroine's psychological damage. "My childhood was excessively unhappy," Guggenheim wrote. "I have no pleasant memories of any kind." Her youth was lonely and restricted: she didn't attend school until she was fifteen. She had two children with her first husband, but she was a neglectful and selfish mother. In a fit of irritation, she once told her daughter, Pegeen, that she would rather have a Picasso than her. (It is no wonder, then, that Pegeen, who became a painter, finally succeeded in killing herself, after more than a dozen attempts, in 1967.) Here, through the creakiest of expository devices, Robertson contrives to telegraph Guggenheim's misguided love and ambitions for her daughter by having Pegeen offstage in the bathroom, preparing for an exhibit of her art that her mother has arranged. Later, in an even more vulgar attempt to manufacture drama, he has Guggenheim working two telephone lines at once: talking about disposing of her collection on one, and about her daughter disposing of herself on the other.

Although there is plenty hanging above this play—an escritoire, a mirror, and a behemoth mobile, reminiscent of the silver headboard that Alexander Calder made for Guggenheim, dangle over the garish proceedings like so many charms on a bracelet—there is very little underneath it. "Woman Before a Glass" is meant to recall Guggenheim's glamour and largesse (in the program note, Robertson asks us to raise a metaphorical glass to Guggenheim and her collection—"It's our privilege," he writes. "It's her due"), but what it made me remember instead was a phrase from Uncle Remus: "Fattenin' hogs ain't in luck."



Mercedes Ruehl brings a nervy, wisecracking energy to Peggy Guggenheim.

If Peggy Guggenheim comes onstage because she can, the chemist and author Primo Levi, in "Primo" (a National Theatre production, at the Hampstead, in London), stands before us because he must. Levi is a witness to the Holocaust, and, as Antony Sher expertly plays him (Sher also adapted the play from Levi's "If This Is a Man"), his presence has a quiet, commanding urgency. The director Richard Wilson's subtle deployment of light and sound gives Levi's language a luminous facticity, a sort of scientific meticulousness that registers the Nazi mayhem in simple sentences and with an almost clinical detachment. "Again and again sleep was interrupted by noisy and futile arguments . . . curses, cries . . . kicks and punches delivered blindly," Levi says of his journey by cattle car to Auschwitz. "Then someone would light a candle and its little flicker would show a strange human mass spread over the floor, sluggish and aching, rising in sudden convulsions, collapsing again." In this plethora of vivid detail, rendered with a storyteller's rhythmic gift, speech goes beyond exposition to illumination. "Death begins with your shoes," Levi says. "Your wooden-soled shoes. At first they're like instruments of torture. After a few hours of marching you already have painful sores. These quickly become infected. Then you're forced to walk in a kind of shuffle, as if dragging a convict's chain."

The audience anticipates Levi's experience only to be surprised by the reality he finds. When he arrives at Auschwitz, for instance, the S.S. men are not brutal. And, among themselves, the prisoners can be as predatory as their captors. "We learn the art of sleeping with your head on a hard bundle—our jacket wrapped round everything else we own, from food bowl to shoes." Levi's descriptions are strategic, both for his consciousness and for ours. This gives "Primo" a mesmerizing internal tension; the audience is drawn afresh into the drama of history.

Austin Pendleton's "Orson's Shadow" (under the direction of David Cromer, at the Barrow Street Theatre) is not a one-man show, but it cleverly brings together a number of one-man bands: Sir Laurence Olivier (John Judd), Orson Welles (Jeff Still), and the critic Kenneth Tynan (Tracy Letts). In a riveting play that reimagines a moment in 1960 when these theatrical titans collaborated on a botched production of Eugène Ionesco's "Rhinoceros," Pendleton dissects the political agendas of each of the egotists and spices up the proceedings with a dash of matrimonial chaos. Olivier's loopy then wife, Vivien Leigh (Lee Roy Rogers), and his pudgy, pragmatic mistress, Joan Plowright (Susan Bennett), the future Lady O., stir up the cauldron of real and false emotion in the rehearsal room.

Pendleton is also a distinguished actor and director; he relishes the world he describes, and he knows well the games that actors play with one another and with themselves. This lends a vivacious depth to the bad behavior on display here. The show, which originated at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, is exceptional for the bravura acting of the company, which includes Ian Westerfer, who plays an oafish stage manager whose only intellectual concern seems to be whether Welles slept with Rita Hayworth. Judd's Olivier, a whirlwind of passive-aggressive conceit and cunning, is particularly memorable. "Orson's Shadow" is a backstage story, but a satisfying one. Although the play isn't trying to score points about theatre, it certainly makes one: the greatest show on earth is the show of human emotion. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

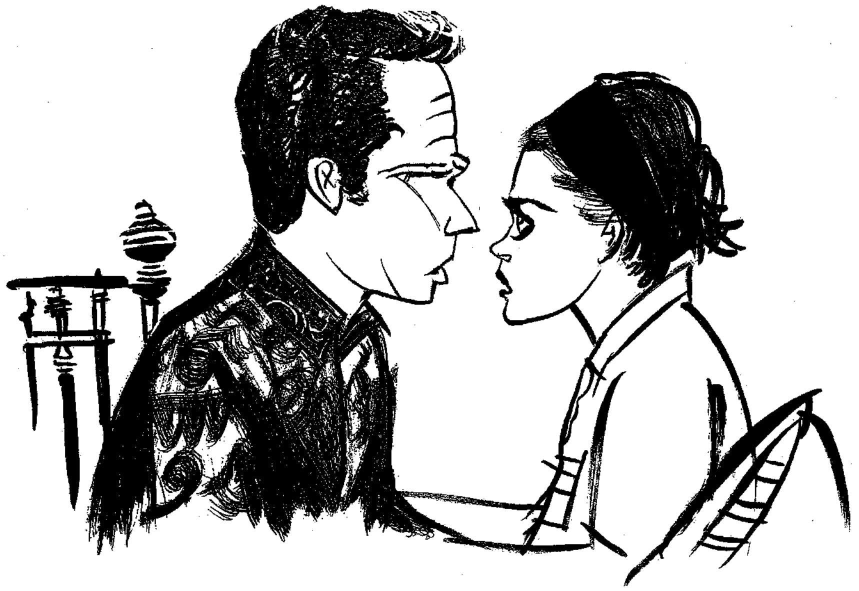
DOUBLE TROUBLE

Woody Allen's "Melinda and Melinda."

BY DAVID DENBY

Imagine Neil Simon and Arthur Miller engaged in a mettlesome debate: Is life a comedy or a tragedy? Is our "deeper reality" a joke or a catastrophe? That's the idea behind Woody Allen's new movie, "Melinda and Melinda." At a restaurant in the Village, four friends are having dinner. Two of them are playwrights, one specializing in comedy (Wallace Shawn), the other in serious drama (Larry Pine). The atmosphere, warmed by wine and fellowship, is expansive, grandiloquent. One of the diners sets forth a proposal, and we see it as told: Melinda (Radha Mitchell), a distraught young woman, slender, blond, and travelling light, shows up unexpectedly at the apartment of married New York friends who are in the middle of giving a dinner party. We then see this premise as it's developed first by the tragic playwright and then by the comic one. In the tragic version, Melinda is an alcoholic, a pill-popper, and suicidal; she can't stop talking about herself, disrupts everything, and puts a strain on her two hosts, who are increasingly at odds. Lee (Jonny Lee Miller) is a onetime college hot shot getting nowhere as an actor in New York; his wife, Laurel (Chloë Sevigny), is a "Park Avenue princess" who teaches music part time between bouts of shopping. In the comic version, the hosts are again a couple coming unglued—Hobie (Will Ferrell), another failed New York actor, and Susan (Amanda Peet), a young filmmaker hustling cash for an independent feature she wants to direct. The two stories—accompanied by Stravinsky and Bartók for the tragic tale, and by Ellington for the comic tale—continue to play in alternation, with occasional shifts back to the restaurant. By the end of the evening, the four diners agree that comedy and tragedy are not mutually exclusive—on the contrary, the most enjoyable moments in life may be shadowed by pain, the saddest by an aura of absurdity.

My first response to this ambitious movie was relief. Many of the "late" Woody Allen movies have been tough to sit through, not just because they undermined the good will built up by his earlier work but because Allen's appealing method of working—quickly and spontaneously—seemed no longer right for him. "The Curse of the Jade Scorpion," "Hollywood Ending," and "Anything Else" were conceptually so thin and undeveloped that they seemed to have been discarded onto the screen before Allen had worked them out in his head. "Melinda and Melinda" is fuller, more intricate; it has monologues, party scenes, good moments for actors. And it's emotionally more alive than anything Allen has done since "Sweet and Lowdown," in 1999. I was absorbed in it, and I liked parts of it. And I wish to God it were better. The trouble with the idea set up in the restaurant is that Allen only half carries it out. An odd sort of indifference or blindness seems to have overcome him during production—odd because making the movie work better than it does wouldn't have taken much extra effort.



Will Ferrell and Amanda Peet play one of two couples who are coming unglued.

It turns out that the stories are surprisingly hard to tell apart. Almost every time Allen moved from one narrative to the other, it took me a few moments, and a fairly violent mental exertion, to realize which story I was watching. Different actors surround Radha Mitchell in each story, but, until nearly the end of the movie, her appearance and behavior are pretty much the same in both. Melinda the tragic and Melinda the comic are both self-destructive young women with sad tales to tell. And the general atmospheres of the two stories, and even some of the characters, are very similar—one quickly forgets the conceit that two very different playwrights are supposed to be shaping the material.

In the comic version, Will Ferrell has the funny Woody Allen lines—complaints, jealous rants—and he delivers them, as certain Woody surrogates have in the past, by imitating Allen's speech rhythms and intonations. The rest of the comic story, however, is not very comical. And the visual scheme, which could have helped differentiate the two stories, is virtually identical. Both are set in Woodyland, that familiar elegant fantasy version of Manhattan, furnished for the umpteenth time by Allen's set designer Santo Loquasto, and filmed by Vilmos Zsigmond. We are regaled with flawless Upper East Side town houses and SoHo lofts; a color palette of sombre browns, tans, ochre, dark green, and black; an air of beauty and luxury, with no glare, no neon, no pop culture anywhere. The movie—all of it—looks like a harmoniously chic design supplement to a Sunday magazine. Decorators will love it.

Allen seems to fall into his Manhattan classicism almost by reflex. (How many times has he taken the A train?) In this case, his desire that everything look and sound lovely overcomes any sort of practical sense of how to make the material work dramatically. The extraordinary handsomeness not only makes the stories hard to tell apart; it outclasses the principal characters, who are almost all shallow, nattering, self-seeking people. They fall in and out of love, but their passions seem abrupt and rather arbitrary; they spend much of their time complaining about themselves or the others. In the absence of satirical intention or strong dramatic action, we are left with such cranky questions as: Why put two failed actors in the movie? What's learned from the doubling? If Allen wanted us to compare the playwrights' treatment of the two characters, why does he shoot Jonny Lee Miller's Lee from a hostile, objective middle distance? As Lee falls, he doesn't even rate a closeup. Except for a suave African-American opera composer (Chiwetel Ejiofor), whom the tragic Melinda loves, these people are blocked and useless, and even the composer, who switches women very quickly and sweet-talks everyone, seems trivial and something of a fake. Chekhov's characters are drowning in futility, too, and some of them turn malicious, but the people in "Uncle Vanya" and "Three Sisters" are trapped by land, by a serious lack of cash, by history. They aren't free. The urban screw-ups in "Melinda and Melinda" can do what they want, they have plenty of money, and they still choose to behave like jerks. Why are we watching them? After a while, the debate in the restaurant begins to seem a little fatuous—there's not much comedy *or* tragedy in the movie. As a philosophical position, the notion that life is a tangled mix of the two is, perhaps, plausible. But it's a hopeless bog for this filmmaker.

Allen's most grievous lost opportunity is with Radha Mitchell (who played Johnny Depp's wife in "Finding Neverland"). Born in Australia, the beautiful Mitchell, who has an anxious brow and darting eyes, bears some resemblance to the intense young Jessica Lange. Mitchell is a performer who brings an almost lyrical flow to vulnerability. But Allen abuses her skills. In both roles, he drives her relentlessly into the fidgets. Overwrought and fussy in one scene after another, this talented actress destroys her performance out of an obvious desire to please her director. The tragic Melinda invariably makes herself a pain in the neck, and long before the end of the movie one begins to have such sour thoughts as "People who can't pull themselves together don't rise to the level of tragedy. Neurosis isn't tragic; it's energy wasted." The happy Melinda is only slightly less draggy. I found myself impatient and even a little bored with both Melindas, and Allen may have been, too—the happy Melinda story wraps up suddenly and unconvincingly, and the tragic one lands in disaster in a way that can only be called cruel. The point of unhappy Melinda's fate seems to be: Stay away from losers—they will just pull you down. That kind of nasty wisdom is a long way from debonair conversations about the nature of life and art in a pleasant Village restaurant.

Nothing could be more charming than freckled, knobby-kneed English boys, particularly those from the North Country, so young Alex Etel and Lewis McGibbon can't be blamed for what goes wrong in "Millions." In a surprisingly sunny suburb of Manchester, two motherless lads—one pious and generous (Etel), the other enterprising and manipulative (McGibbon)—find a Nike bag filled with cash after thieves throw it off a moving train. Will the boys invest the money, give it to the poor, spend it on video games? And when will the nasty blackguards who stole the swag in the first place show up to claim it? "Millions," written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by Danny Boyle, should have had the enchantment of "Empire of the Sun" or the recent Italian film "I'm Not Scared" or a dozen other child-centered movies, but Boyle, the director of such scabrous films as "Trainspotting" and "28 Days Later," can't stop showing off his virtuosity. He changes camera speeds, zips through sequences, sends things flying through the air. We're supposed to be overwhelmed by magic, but what we see is fancy film technique and a lot of strained whimsy. To use special effects without coming off as glib, you may have to be a boy at heart yourself (i.e., Steven Spielberg). "Millions" is amiable enough, but Boyle should have sensed that the greatest magic lay in the faces and temperaments of his fervent young actors. ♦

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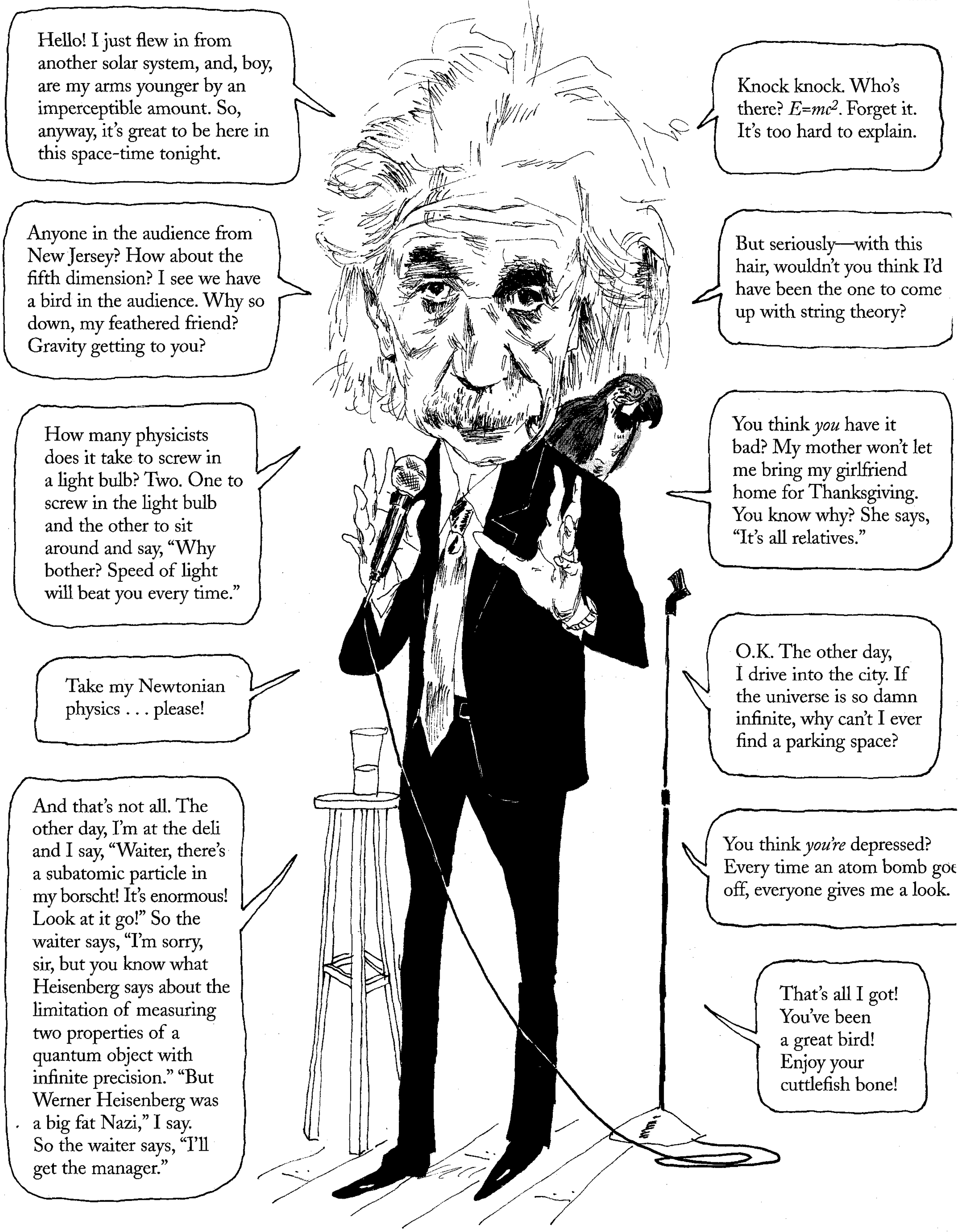
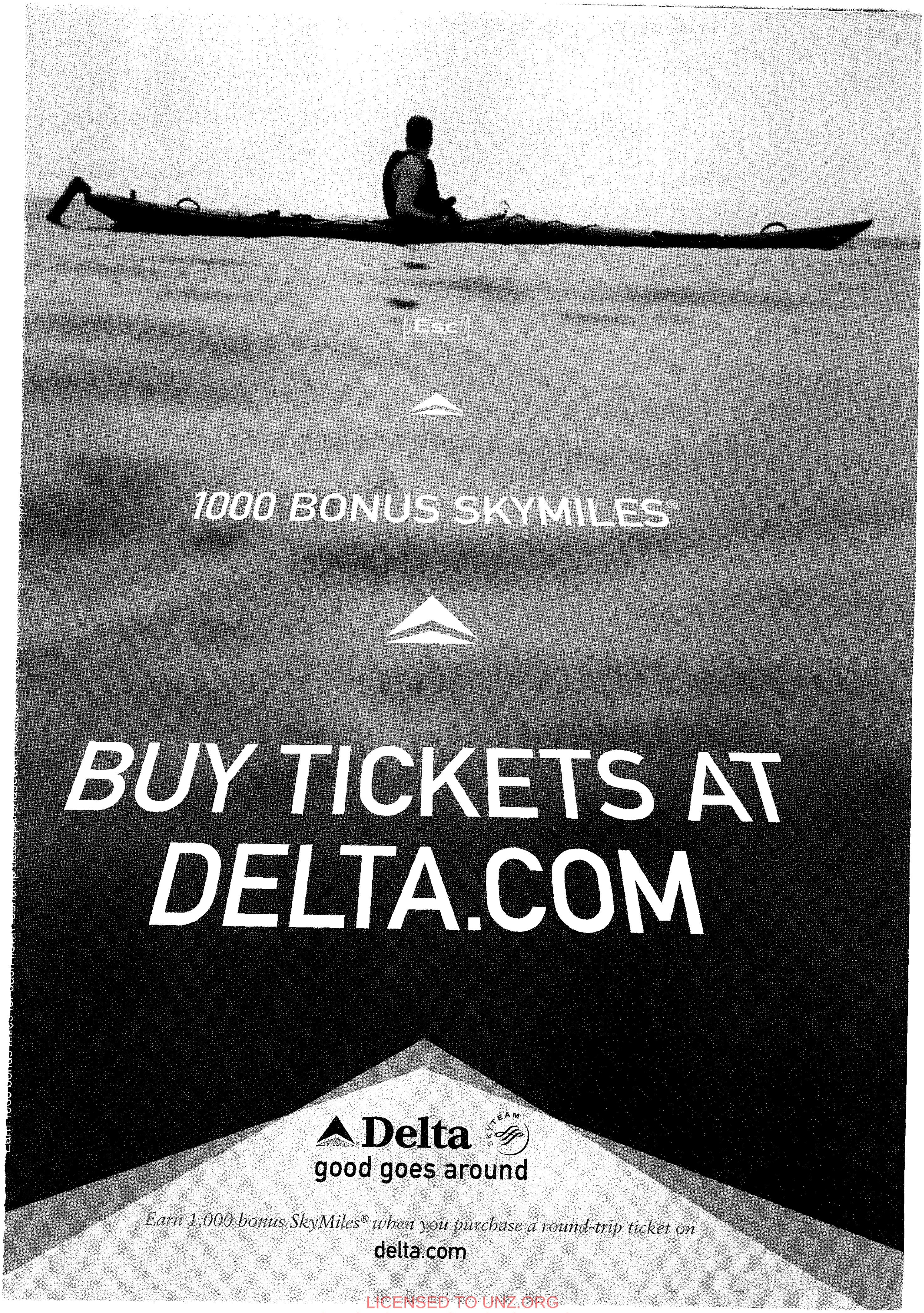
THE BACK PAGE BY PATRICIA MARX

Einstein's 75th birthday occurred on March 14, 1954, and among the flood of presents from around the world was a parrot, sent in the mail by a medical institute. Einstein took a liking to the parrot, which he named Bibo, but he decided the bird was depressed. He tried to cheer it up by telling it bad jokes.

—*The Times.*


Hello! I just flew in from another solar system, and, boy, are my arms younger by an imperceptible amount. So, anyway, it's great to be here in this space-time tonight.
Anyone in the audience from New Jersey? How about the fifth dimension? I see we have a bird in the audience. Why so down, my feathered friend? Gravity getting to you?
How many physicists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Two. One to screw in the light bulb and the other to sit around and say, "Why bother? Speed of light will beat you every time."
Take my Newtonian physics . . . please!
And that's not all. The other day, I'm at the deli and I say, "Waiter, there's a subatomic particle in my borscht! It's enormous! Look at it go!" So the waiter says, "I'm sorry, sir, but you know what Heisenberg says about the limitation of measuring two properties of a quantum object with infinite precision." "But Werner Heisenberg was a big fat Nazi," I say. So the waiter says, "I'll get the manager."
Knock knock. Who's there? $E=mc^2$. Forget it. It's too hard to explain.
But seriously—with this hair, wouldn't you think I'd have been the one to come up with string theory?
You think *you* have it bad? My mother won't let me bring my girlfriend home for Thanksgiving. You know why? She says, "It's all relatives."
O.K. The other day, I drive into the city. If the universe is so damn infinite, why can't I ever find a parking space?
You think *you're* depressed? Every time an atom bomb goe off, everyone gives me a look.
That's all I got! You've been a great bird! Enjoy your cuttlefish bone!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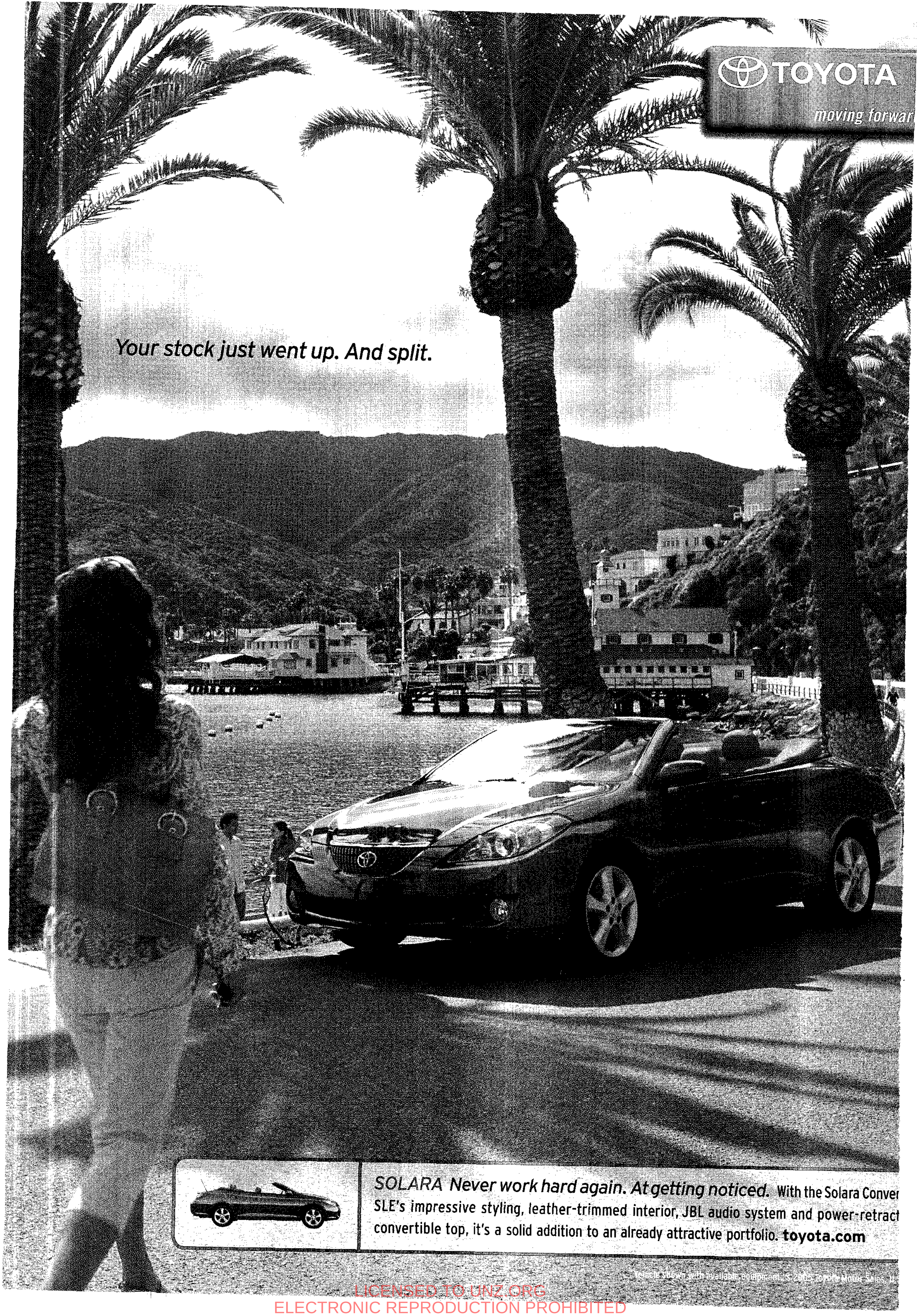
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